



It Gets Stranger by **LadyHuntressOfBedlam**

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Summary: Another victim of Hawkin's Lab finds Jane after a horrific tragedy to see if she can help right several wrong and...strange things in Derry, Maine. [will include everyone in the Party and the Loser's Club...eventually. Rated T for language.]

1. Prologue

The girl was short for her age, and was only grateful that it was not winter. She hated winter. Sometimes she went for months without changing if it was cold.

However, it was the end of summer and the beginning of autumn so it was cold out. In an age where most people now owned washing and drying machines it was rare that she could find clothes so easily. Shoes were harder, but she didn't need shoes. Her feet were tougher than any boot's sole. Still, humans required shoes. It was stupid, but humans did strange things and she needed to look as human as possible.

The dress she'd stolen was bright blue with a few green and yellow stripes on the hem. Her hair was blonde, and a bit of a mess in a rats nest so she tied it on top of her head in a haphazard knot. Her fingernails had dirt under them.

She didn't mind. She liked the dirt. She'd kept herself safe hiding in the dirt more than once before. She knew this place. She could smell it in the air. A scent of home. What might have been home. She had seen the lab, or what it used to be. It was closed down now.

Good.

Still, she wasn't there for Uncle. She was there for her cousin. She was here. She couldn't see or smell her, but she could feel her. She needed her help, desperately.

It took some focus, but she found the minds of her friends. The only friends who were always there. Friends that didn't leave or hurt her. She slipped into their thoughts and became one with them, her eyes becoming theirs. Birds couldn't see the world the same way that humans did. She missed the colors, but that was the only complaint she ever had. That and the aches and nosebleeds that often followed.

It was a starling that found her cousin. The girl wasn't too fond of starlings. They were cowardly alone, but bullies in groups. Still, they made excellent spies. Through the eyes of the starling she watched as

her cousin entering a large building. A school, she was sure. It certainly looked different from a bird's eyes.

Her cousin looked...happy. She was holding a boy's hand as she walked toward the entrance of the building. She was surrounded by others. A pack of humans. She was smiling and joking with the other young males of the pack. She was glad that her cousin had a pack. People needed packs the same way dogs and wolves did. The same way birds needed a flock.

It made her sad to think she might be taking one of her own away from her pack. She wished she had her pack again, but this was bigger and more important than pack.

She peeled her mind away from the starling's and gasped when she opened her eyes, back in a human world of color in her stolen blue dress. She regained her bearings and began walking towards the school, wiping her bloody nose off on her wrist, leaving a long, red mark over the black tattoo on her wrist that read 009.

2. The Stranger

El smiled as Max shot another insult at Dustin, who took it in stride, shooting another right back at her. Life was nice. She would have been happy to stay that way forever. True, it was only her second week of going to school. A real school like an ordinary kid! Hopper had kept his promise. When she thought back to how she had acted with him she felt guilty, but she wouldn't have taken it back.

Well, she had taken back when she had said he was like Papa. He wasn't. He wasn't Papa. He was...dad now. The difference between Papa and Dad were vast and extraordinary.

"Are you okay?" Mike asked, pulling her out of her thoughts.

She turned and looked at him, his face drawn and serious. She smiled at him despite this. She knew a lot of people said awful things about him. They called him frog face. She liked his face. His smile and his eyes. If he looked like a frog, which she didn't think he did, she must have liked frogs.

"I'm fine, Mike," she assured him.

"Give the girl a break," Max quipped, gently pushing Mike's shoulder. "She's still at a point where she enjoys school. Let her like it before reality sets in."

"I like school," Will spoke up, his brow furrowed.

"I like school," Max repeated, a mocking tone in her voice.

There were more words exchanged, but El didn't pay any attention to them. Her attention had been arrested by a girl. She'd attracted the attention of others, but none of it was good. Some people asked if she was lost. Others called her a freak as they walked past her. She glared after those ones. A pair of boys asked her if she had lost her shoes in a bet before moving on from her. Before they'd brought that up El hadn't even notice that the girl was barefoot.

El hadn't realized she'd stopped walking to stare at the strange girl,

who was looking through the crowd, searching for something. For someone, more like. Her search seemed to end when her eyes fell upon El. She stared at her, and El stared back. There was something...familiar about this girl. She was about El's age, maybe a year younger and her hair was yellow and wild, despite how its ties tried to contain it.

The girl smiled at El and something about it made El feel...uneasy, but also comforted.

Mike had been jostling her arm, repeating her name, and trying to get her attention, but it wasn't until Dustin snapped his fingers near her ear that she looked away from the girl with yellow hair. "What?" she asked, glancing around, suddenly sheepish when she saw that all of her friends were looking at her with concern.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Mike asked again.

She could feel his palm sweating against hers and she could see the concern in his eyes. Before answering she looked back to where the girl with wild, yellow hair had been only to see that she was now gone. Swallowing a lump in her throat she nodded. "Promise."

"Well we better get going," Lucas spoke up. "We promised Mrs. Byers we'd be over for for dinner and I have a stupid essay to write before."

El hesitated before climbing onto the back of Mike's bike. As they rode away she clung tightly around his waist, eyes still peeled for the girl with yellow hair.

Happy Halloween! I'm going to be trying something new where I post this in tiny chapters that will add up to big chapters. I saw someone on Tumblr say that they thought that the Party and the Loser's Club needed to team up and I agree. Since I couldn't find any crossover stories I decided to make one. I hope you guys like it. It's a lot of fun in my head...I'm going through Stranger Things withdrawals so this is happening. (i shouldn't have watched the second season in a single setting, but I do what I want...god that makes me sound like a drug addict). Anyway, thanks for the follows already with me. You guys are beauties. Happy Halloween...again.

3. Roadkill

"I hate this car," Nancy snapped as Jonathan's shitty old Ford lurched under her control.

Her boyfriend just laughed at her frustration, which caused her to glare at him and shout his name, exasperated. This just made Jonathan laugh harder.

"Nance, it's okay, just don't force it," he said, trying to calm her down, but still laughing at the madness of it all.

"I can drive, Jonathan," she shouted at him, stressed from the unpredictability of the car. "Your car is just a piece of shit."

With an annoyed sigh, Jonathan said, "Look, Nancy, if you want to borrow my car next week I just need to make sure that you know how to drive it. I know it's finicky. I mean, I could see if my mom."

"No," Nancy cut him off. She didn't want to bother Mrs. Byers with that. Poor Joyce had enough to worry about so she didn't like the idea of putting more stress on her.

Jonathan nodded, all but reading her mind. "Alright, well, let's give it another try. More gently this time."

After that it was easier, the frustration released. They left the parking lot and Jonathan declared that Nancy was good enough for them to go on a drive.

As they drove they talked. They talked about everything. Early application for college, music, and just about anything.

Almost anything. They didn't talk about Hawkins anymore. Not since the lab had gone down. Still, it was there. One day they would talk about it again. They both knew the day would come, but they would cross that bridge when they came to it.

Jonathan told her that they should get heading back. They were supposed to have dinner with the kids and the chief at his house and he wanted them to get there a bit early in case his mom needed help.

He reached out and Nancy put her hand in his as they drove to the Byers house.

Nancy was putting out her cheek for Jonathan to give her a kiss on it when she screamed in surprise and slammed hard on the breaks, but not fast enough. There was a loud thud and a whining squeal as the dog they'd hit was thrown off the bumper and onto the street.

"Oh my god," Nancy gasped, beginning to panic. "Oh my god. I killed it, oh my god."

"It's okay, Nance, shhh shhh, it's okay," Jonathan told her as he held tightly to her hand, trying to hide the quaver in his own voice. "I'll... I'll go see if it's okay, alright?"

Nancy nodded and forced herself to put the car in park and stare out the window, watching as Jonathan knelt next to the dog she'd hit, waiting with bated breath.

Meanwhile, Jonathan approached the dog, who was whining and trying to lick at an open gash at its side. The dog was a huskey with grey and white fur and bright blue eyes.

When Jonathan came close to it the creature's ears lowered and it growled. It tried to stand up to run off, but it yelped, unable to put weight on its front paw.

"Hey, it's okay," Jonathan said, reaching his hand out to the animal could learn his scent. "I'll take you home. We'll try and fix you up, okay?"

The dog stared at him like it was considering his words. To his surprise, though, the huskey started to limp towards the car, stopping when it was standing next to the back door.

He started at the creature in befuddled surprise and didn't move to let the animal in the car until it gave him an impatient yip.

Once in the car he and Nancy traded places and Nancy kept an eye on the dog as they made their way to Jonathan's house. It licked its wounds, but its eyes were fixed on Nancy and Jonathan, mistrusting and strangely intelligent.

When they arrived Jonathan went in first to warn his mom and the others and Nancy stayed behind with the dog. After considering it for a moment Nancy turned back to look at the dog, who was still licking at the cut on its side.

"I'm sorry," Nancy told the dog.

To her surprise, the dog stopped cleaning its wound and fixed its gaze on Nancy as she spoke. "I really didn't mean to hit you. I would... never try and hurt a dog. Or any other creature." Nancy was fond of dogs and cats. She didn't consider the Demogorgon an animal. That was different. This was an accident.

The dog stood up on the back seat and gave Nancy a gentle lick on the cheek, almost like it was saying that it was okay.

When Jonathan opened the door and said that everyone was ready for them Nancy jumped, startled. The dog, however, moved away as if nothing had happened and limped out the door that Jonathan held open for it.

Nancy was slower to follow, watching the dog as it made its way into the Byers' house.

4. The Unexpected Guest

The dog was calm. Calmer than a dog who had just been hit by a car had any right to be. Joyce had told everyone to start eating while she and Hopper tried to bandage the dog up, but they all gathered around to watch the curious animal, who stared back at each of them in turn.

"Do you think this dog broke out of Hawkin's lab or something?" Dustin asked as he watched Mrs. Byers apply a generous amount of Neosporin to the dog's wound.

Lucas stared at his friend incredulously, "Why would you think something stupid like that?"

"Because it's too calm, Lucas!" Dustin shouted back at his friend. "I mean, with all the stuff they did there."

"Would you put a sock in it?" Hopper sighed as he helped Joyce wrap the bandages around the dog's ribcage to keep a gauze pad in place.

He was just as suspicious of the dog as the others were, but he didn't think it was wise to throw around accusations about the lab. Besides, why would the lab care about dogs where their latest experiments were on little kids?

"I'm telling you, something about that dog is fishy," Dustin insisted.

"Dustin just shut your mou-" Mike began, but his words were cut short when there was a knock at the door.

Everyone paused and looked at each other, silently asking each other if anyone was missing. Dustin even began a headcount, looking confused and a bit scared. Max shrunk away behind Lucas, but it was likely that she didn't realize she'd done it. Mike and El's hands found each other's and Nancy and Jonathan looked at each other questioningly.

Will was the only one looking at the dog, who was wagging its tail and had gotten on its feet.

"Are you expecting anyone else?" Hopper asked, reaching for a gun that wasn't on his hip.

Joyce shook her head, but went to the door, making a comment about how everyone was being dramatic and stupid.

On the other side of the door was the same girl that El had seen in the schoolyard, feet still bare, hair still messily thrown up in a bun, and a polite smile upon her face. The only difference was she now had a brown, dirty messenger bag on her shoulder.

"Hello," was the only word that the girl was able to get out before the dog barreled past Joyce, almost knocking her over to get to the girl.

"Hey!" the girl scolded the dog, planting her hands on her hips and glaring down at the dog. "Blue, that was very impolite."

Joyce found herself speechless when the dog's ears went back and it whined. The girl scratched the dog's neck and said, "It's okay, I'm sure she knows you're sorry, just be more careful next time." She looked back at Joyce and said, "Thank you for taking care of my dog. I hope she wasn't any trouble."

After opening her mouth and closing it a few times Joyce managed to say, "Uh...no, she wasn't any trouble. How did you know she was here?"

The girl shrugged, "I just know things. I've been told that I'm too smart for my own good. Anyway, I think we'll be going."

Before they could turn to walk away Joyce caught the girl's arm and stopped her. "Sweetie...where are your shoes?"

The girl looked down at her bare feet and wiggled her toes like she hadn't noticed that her feet were bare. "One of them got sucked off and lost in a patch of mud and I didn't see the point in only wearing one shoe."

Joyce didn't look convinced, but she still said, "Well we're about to have dinner. Why don't you and...Blue, was it? Why don't you two join us?"

"Oh, I couldn't impose," the girl insisted.

"It's the least we could do after hitting your dog," Joyce pressed. She didn't want the little girl to go hungry. She couldn't have been older than thirteen, surely. Plus, it was cold out and the girl didn't even have shoes on and was thin as a rail.

"Well, I am a bit hungry," the girl succeeded. It was a lie. She was starving. She hadn't eaten anything but a few raspberries off a bush that was practically bare in the late season.

With a smile, Joyce said, "Great. We'll be happy to have you. I might have a pair of shoes my son just outgrew that you could have. They might be a bit big for you, but they'll keep your feet warm at least."

"Thank you," the girl replied, warily stepping inside as Joyce led her inside. "What's your name, sweetheart, and I'll introduce you to the others."

"Nina," the girl replied, giving her dog another scratch behind the ear and sharing a quiet look with the animal. "My name's Nina."

Hey everyone! I'm still here, just very busy. I'll try and get a few more segments up at least by the time this upcoming weekend is over. The Loser's Club will be coming into the story in...maybe 3 or 4 chapters? Maybe less. I dunno. Anyway, thanks for all your comments and follows and stuff. I hope you like it. Next chapter is going to explain Nine (or Nina's) backstory a little better. Maybe it'll get up tonight. Maybe tomorrow. Who knows?

5. Dinner

Everyone received Nina politely, except for El and her adoptive father, who stared at the newcomer skeptically. She received everyone politely in kind, with the exception of Mike, who she found herself staring at. She had called him Richie, which confused everyone, but he tried to avert the conversation away from her awkward slip of the tongue.

However, it was...uncanny how alike they looked.

Joyce came back after introductions were done with an old pair of Will's converse sneakers. Nina thanked Joyce, but didn't put the shoes on. Instead, she set them aside, hoping that they'd be forgotten. She didn't want anything from these people. She just needed to talk to them. She knew that they knew about Hawkin's Lab. She didn't like eavesdropping on them through Blue.

The fact that Blue ended up in the same place as Eleven was just a happy coincidence. However, she couldn't back out now. She was here. She had to do what she'd come here to do.

"So, Nina," Joyce began as she pulled out the chair between her and Will for the girl. "How long have you been in town?"

Upon being directly addressed rather than directly addressing the others Nina froze. Under the table, Blue nuzzled up against the girl's leg and Nina took some courage from that. "I got back in town this morning," Nina said, forcing herself to lie as little as possible.

"Back in town?" the police officer pressed.

The way the policeman spoke to her made Nina nervous. However, she forced herself to nod. "Yes, I used to live here for a while."

"What grade are you in?" Dustin asked from across the table.

"Ninth," the girl answered.

"Then the boys might have had some classes with you," Joyce said, trying to hide her surprise at the girl's age. She could have sworn that

she was younger. She couldn't have been more than five feet tall and she was so petite.

Nina shook her head at this, "No, I was...home schooled."

'Why aren't you telling them about Derry?' asked a voice that only Nina could hear.

She moved to look under the table and glared at Blue, who was contentedly accepting a cleaning from the Byer's dog. She would usually speak to Blue, but she didn't want them to think she was insane. Still, Blue had a point.

"Officer?" the girl asked when a brief silence fell over the table. She was aware of Eleven staring at her and it took everything for Nina to not pull the girl into an embrace and ask if she remembered her.

Nina doubted it. The scientists at the lab had found a way to toy with the memories of their extras, as the files she had stolen referred to them as. Nina's memories had toyed with so much that the treatments began to stop working. She didn't tell them that though.

Still, all of the extras had their triggers if they'd been through the process. Now all Nina needed to do was trigger Eleven's memories and hope that she had Nina in there somewhere still. She and the losers couldn't fix what was happening in Derry. Not without help.

"Yeah kid?" Hopper asked, putting down his beer and fixing her with a stern gaze.

"I was wondering if you might be willing to look at something for me," she answered, her voice a bit small, but unshaken.

"I can have someone look at whatever you need seen to," Hopper sighed, returning to cutting his meatloaf.

"I think you'll want to see it yourself, sir," the girl insisted.

Hopper heaved an annoyed sigh, but finally said, "Alright, fine. I'll look at whatever you need me to look at after dinner, alright?"

Nina nodded, "Yes, sir. Thank you."

The rest of the meal went by relatively quietly, at least for Nina. The boys fell into a comfortable conversation full of playful banter that made her miss her own friends back in Derry. Still, she'd see them again soon. She had to keep telling herself that. If she didn't then...well, then she had failed. There was too much at stake to fail.

She couldn't fail.

She wasn't unaware of how Eleven kept staring at her. They called her Jane now. Occasionally El. Short for Eleven, Nina presumed. It was clever.

Jane must have found out about her real name and her real mother.

She was happy to know that. Nina still didn't know what her real name was. She didn't know who her real mother was. She knew more than most of the other extras had known. She had had a life before she was taken to Hawkin's Lab. What was in that life she couldn't say. Perhaps she'd find out one day, but that wasn't as important right now.

The kids were getting ready to go when Nina interrupted the police officer as he was putting on his coat.

"Sir, do you have a moment?" she asked again, formal and polite.

Hopper looked down at her suspiciously, but said, "Alright, kid, what is it you wanted to show me?"

Hiding her nerves, she reached into her bag, which she hadn't let out of her sight since she came to the Byer's house. She gave him a bundle of files. Files that she had fought tooth and nail for. It had been one hell of a day. Still, she was sure it was no picnic for Eleven. Nina wasn't sure what had happened when the rift opened, but she was sure that her cousin had something to do with it.

"What the hell's this?" Hopper asked, his lips wrapped around a cigarette and warbling his speech a bit.

"You'll see," Nina informed him before moving around the tall man and out the door. "Blue, to me."

The dog yipped and shot out from under the table to join her owner.

Joyce called out that the girl had forgotten her shoes, but before she could reach her the girl was out of sight.

"Weird girl," Lucas commented, shaking his head.

Max and El both shot him annoyed looks, but he didn't seem to notice.

Hopper heaved a sigh and silently agreed with Lucas before taking El's shoulder in his hand. "Come on, kid. Let's go home. You've got homework still, right?"

El nodded and bid everyone else goodbye, her mind trying to work over exactly who Nina was and what she wanted.

6. Late Night Reading

Hopper didn't get to sleep until about three in the morning that night. He followed his usual routine. He tucked El into bed after reading her some of Anne of Avonlea. They'd already read the series once, and he'd read other classics to her to. Books that he had planned to read to Sara one day. Still, he wasn't a fool. He knew El wasn't Sara and that she'd never replaced her, but she was still his girl.

He had settled down with a beer and was going to watch some television when his eye caught the stack of files the weird, short barefoot girl gave to him at Joyce's house. She was a weird kid, but still just a kid.

Against his better judgment, he picked up the files and heaved a sigh before opening up to the first one.

His heart stopped dead in his chest when he saw what was behind the seemingly harmless manilla folder.

A photo of El was paperclipped in the upper left-hand corner along with her information. Information from Hawkin's Lab. Instead of a name there were the numbers 011 in the top of the page.

He thumbed through the documents, skimming over most of it. He already knew all of this. Jane Ives, taken from her mother, Terry Ives, who was now...incapacitated. The file didn't say how, but it did say that Terry no longer possessed the capacity to be a problem to them anymore.

However, he didn't get to any of that until at least five pages into the file. Before then it was all data based on her abilities, her age, her health records, her blood type, her vaccinations, her medical history. Nothing about who she really was, just numbers and data.

Despite his best efforts, Jim found himself starting to panic. Was this kid trying to threaten him? He didn't think it seemed likely. The girl was puny and maybe five feet tall. She seemed to be anything but dangerous. Still, how did she know this? Where had the hell did she get these files?

Not wanting to look at his daughter's file anymore he shut it with unnecessary force, marring the pages in the process.

The next file was similar, but it was a different face. A different little girl with the same buzzed hair. This girl had dark skin, though. Her number was 010 and next to her number was the word DECEASED.

The last file was smaller than the rest. Incomplete. Jim didn't know what he expected to see. Probably another stranger with another number. That, however, was not the case. The girl was bald, like Jane and Elizabeth (or Ten as the lab would have called her). However, unlike Ten and Eleven, more than half of Nine's file was gone. Where it was, he couldn't say.

Maybe she hadn't given all of the files to him. Not that he could blame her if that was the case. He heaved a sigh and held up the photo of the girl, who looked like a completely different person with her hair gone. Her hair must have grown faster than his daughter's because it was shoulder length and very unkempt.

"Who are you?" Hopper asked glaring at the picture. He only put the picture down and tucked the files into a safe hiding place when he realized how late it was.

He wasn't sure if he wanted Jane stumbling upon these until he had a better idea of who this Nina, or Nine, was and what she wanted.

It seems like I'm only going to address my readers in even chapters. ...weird. Anyway, I just wanted to point out that this story now has eleven followers and eleven favorites. :D It's very exciting and I don't want anyone else to follow or favorite this story because of it.

I'm just kidding notice me senpai '

Anyway, leave me a review or send me a message or whatever. I love hearing from you guys. Any theories or suggestions or whatever just lemme know.

7. Smoke On The Water

Steve was really annoyed. First of all, he was back from college for the weekend to visit his parents for his mom's birthday and...his parents' repaid him by ditching him and having him watch the house for them. It wasn't all bad though.

At least Steve told himself as much. He could hang out at the pool while he did his homework, his old high school friends were nearby, he could visit with Dustin.

Sure, it wasn't the blazing and loving welcome he would have wanted, but it wasn't so bad. It would be nice to be back in Hawkins. It was a nice town...when things from the Upside Down weren't trying to rip him and his friends to pieces.

It was shaping up to be a decent Friday with his feet in the pool and his brain being attacked mercilessly by his books he only half understood.

Things took a turn for the weird, though, when he found himself staring at a kid screwing around in his pool. She wasn't swimming. She just had her hair in the water. It took him a bit longer to realize that she was washing her hair in his pool.

Without thinking about it, he slid open his door abruptly and shouted, "Hey! What the hell're you doing?"

The girl looked up at Steve, her eyes widening before she hopped up on her feet and started to run. All of Steve's years on the basketball team did him justice and he managed to catch up with the girl.

For someone so little she was surprisingly fast. However, Steve had the advantage of longer legs. He was about to tackle her when he noticed a dog on his heels, snarling and snapping at him.

"Hey!" the girl snapped, stopping so suddenly that Steve rammed into her and would have knocked her over if he hadn't grabbed her shoulders and took a few fumbling steps forward with her in hand.

The dog was still growling and snapping at him and only stopped when the girl stepped between Steve and the dog. "Blue, just because I'm on the run doesn't mean you have to be rude to the people chasing me."

Blue looked thoughtfully between Nina and Steve before snorting angrily in the older boy's direction, her teeth still bared. Nina folded her arms over her chest and gave the dog a look that made Steve think of how his mom used to look down at him when he was a kid and had done something stupid. Steve was too confused to do anything to counteract this strange change of pace.

The girl moved to shoot back into a sprint, but Steve was fast enough to grab her and pull her to a stop. Even with how slight her frame was Steve was surprised at how thing her arm felt. "Let go of me," the girl snapped trying to rip her arm out of his grip.

"Just...calm down," Steve told her as he took her other arm in hand and made her look at him. "What're you doing?"

The girl looked at him questioningly, like she was silently wondering if he was just stupid. "Running, obviously."

She flexed her arm a bit under, testing his grip. Her brow furrowed when his hand didn't move. She was fast, sure, and she could hide better than anyone, but usually, darkness was her ally.

"I meant what are you doing in my parents' pool," Steve snapped.

"Just cleaning my hair," she answered.

"Without shampoo?" Steve asked the question as if it were the single most appalling thing he'd ever heard.

"Yeah," she answered. "I mean, it takes longer, but beggars can't be choosers."

Steve fixed the girl with a thoughtful gaze and looked her up and down. The kid looked like she was little more than skin and bone.

"Where are your parents?"

With a shrug, the girl answered, "I genuinely do not know."

Steve thought of what he should and could do before he finally rolled his eyes and shook his head. This wasn't going to be as relaxing and productive a day as he might have thought. "Come on, you can use the downstairs's shower."

"What?" the girl asked, glancing down at her dog, who cocked her head at this.

Steve nodded and repeated, "Yeah, you can use the downstairs shower."

My mom might have something you could wear until your dress dries. It looks like it needs a washing. Then, when you're clean, you can have some breakfast."

When the girl didn't follow him right away Steve turned around and said, "Come on, I'd rather not drag you back and I need some breakfast."

The dog, which had been mean and fierce looking just seconds before looking up at the girl, tail wagging and tongue lolling out of its mouth before jetting up to Steve.

He recoiled from it, recalling how it had tried to bite him, but he was pleasantly surprised that the animal licked his fingers before running back to the house.

The girl heaved a sigh and shook her head, but followed them back still the same.

We love big brother Steve. Also, coming up with chapter titles is annoying.

8. Beep Beep Richie

Mike joined the rest of his friends as they walked towards the front of the school building. El was acting...distant and quiet today. She was usually pretty quiet, but today it was more...dramatic than usual.

He was almost afraid to take her hand so he let her have her space. He knew she'd never do anything to hurt him, but it was still a bit unsettling to see her like this. She was usually so fascinated with everything around her.

He didn't blame her, of course. She had been locked up for all her life. He'd be fascinated with everything if that was the case as well. Still, he wondered what might be tucked away inside that brain of hers.

He was about to be quiet with his girlfriend, thinking about what El was thinking about, but he wasn't given that option.

"So what do you guys think of that Nina girl?" Max asked, moving to walk in front of them all, walking backward so she could face all of them. When she did this it generally meant that she was talking to all of them and expected an answer back from all of them.

"She was weird," Lucas answered first. "I mean, no offense to her, but whenever a weird girl comes into our lives shit starts getting weird."

He realized what he had said and leaned forward so he could see El past Dustin, Mike, and Will. "No offense, El."

El raised an eyebrow at him and shook her head, indicating that no offense was taken.

"I dunno," Dustin said. "I mean, she was kind of quiet, but I think there's something more to her than all of that. I mean, what was the deal with her and the chief?"

"I don't know," Lucas answered. "All I know is that a normal year would be probably the most amazing thing in the world. However, if the past few years have been any indication then I'm sure you'd see

that that's highly unlikely."

"You're very optimistic, Lucas," Will joked.

"I'm just saying," Lucas replied.

No one had anything to say to that. Lucas was right about that. Still, they weren't given much of a chance. "Oh shit," Max exclaimed, drawing all of their attention away from them to see her older brother storming down the front pathway towards them.

She might have thought that someone else was the unfortunate victim of his up and coming wrath, but the way his eyes were determinedly fixed upon her and the rest of the party made her less certain.

They all paused and turned around in time for Billy to grab Mike by the collar and slam him up against a light pole. Max and her friends all shouted at Billy to let Mike go, but he wouldn't listen. Mike was much taller than last year, having gone through a growth spurt a few weeks ago, but Billy, being a senior to Mike's freshman, had an advantage.

"You think you're funny, Wheeler?" Billy snarled, furious and snarling.

Max led her friends in a chorus of 'let him go' and 'piss off, Billy'. Mike tried to wedge his way out of Billy's grasp, but Billy held him firm and shoved him back against the pole.

El found herself glaring at the scene, recalling how her dad had told her to be careful about using her powers now. She could have broken Billy's neck if she wanted to, but she caught Mike's eye and waited. Ignoring the other Freshmen Billy put his face close to Mike's and said,

"Who the hell do you think you are, Wheeler? Strutting around and talking shit about me."

"What're you talking about, Billy?" Mike asked, glaring at the older boy.

Usually, Billy had the sense to leave them alone, but clearly, something that really pissed him off. "You told me to blow my dad. And you had the nerve to tell me to bag my face because I'm, and I quote, 'a mullet wearing asshole'." He slammed Mike against the pole again, not hard enough to hurt him. Just enough to make an impression. "Did you think I'd forget?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Billy," Mike snapped.

"DON'T LIE TO ME!" Billy screamed, spit flying out of his mouth from his unbridled anger.

"Hey, mullet head!"

Everyone paused and turned to see who had addressed them. It was a girl, around their age, with red hair cut just to her neck and freckles everywhere. She was wearing a knee-length dress with a small floral print and worn out brown leather boots that went up a bit past her ankles. She had a scowl on her face and a rock the size of her fist in her hand.

"Who the hell're you, little girl?" Billy asked, his tone mocking.

She glared at him and tossed her rock up an inch or two, "I'm your worst nightmare if you don't let go of my friend."

Mike looked confused and glanced at Dustin, El, Max, Lucas, and Will.

They were all just as confused as he was. The girl, who had been determined and cross before was now just as confused as the others.

"What the fuck?" she said.

"Hey, Molly Ringwald!" a new voice said, another figure jumping next to Dustin and looking at the scene. "Look, Mullet-Dad-Blower is here!"

The boy laughed at his own joke and gave Dustin a genial elbow to the ribs. "I mean, come on, am I right? I'm totally right?"

The boy shoved his glasses up his nose and looked around when no one laughed at his joke. "What's the issues? He's totally a dad blower.

Oedipus has nothing on this guy."

"You little shit," Billy said, realizing that Mike hadn't been the one who had slighted him.

"What the fuck?" The kid said when he saw Mike. Mike, in turn, had nothing to say but stared at the boys with his mouth gaping open. The other boy was wearing a button up shirt that Mike probably wouldn't be caught dead in and a pair of big, black-rimmed glasses, but aside from that, he could have been Mike's twin.

"I'll kill you, you little shit!" Billy screamed, lunging at the boy who could have been Mike's twin.

Before he could get a few steps in the girl with the short, red hair threw the rock she had in her hand and it struck him right on the forehead, knocking him out cold.

"Oh shit, Ringwald!" Mike's doppelganger laughed, leaning down to look at Billy. "Did you kill him?"

"Beep beep, Richie," the girl said with an annoyed shake of her head as she approached them.

"That's not funny, Bev," Richie snapped, glaring at his friend. His reaction only made her laugh, "Beep beep, Richie!" She repeated, more zealously this time.

Richie responded by flipping her off, which only made her laugh harder.

Dustin looked at Mike, who was taking a few deep breaths as El looked him over, making sure he was alright. "Richie," he said, his voice low.

"Mike, that's what that Nina girl called you."

"Nina?" Richie and the girl said, their attention arrested by Dustin now.

"You've met Nina?" the girl asked. "Where is she?"

When no one else answered, confused by the reaction, Will said,

"Yeah, she kind of...crashed dinner last night."

"But where is she now?" Richie asked.

No one indicated that they knew and the girl took fistfuls of hair in her hands and yanked on them, unleashing an annoyed growl.

"This is bad, Bev," Richie informed her.

"I know, Richie," Beverly snapped, glaring at Richie.

"We can help look for her after school," Dustin volunteered. Everyone in the party glared at him, but it was too late. They were in the hunt now.

"Bitchin'," Richie exclaimed. "I'll get to spend more time with my twin!"

He leaned forward and stared at Mike intently, looking for a difference between the two of them. "Do you think we were separated at birth or something like the parent trap?"

Mike's annoyance was painted plainly across his face, "Do you ever shut up?"

"Beep beep, Richie," Beverly repeated. Richie, in turn, glared at her, but, miraculously, shut up. "Meet here after school?" Bev asked.

"Sure, I guess," Max said, still glaring at Dustin. They were supposed to go to the arcade today after school. Not anymore.

I was sad that the movie didn't have 'beep beep Richie' as an inside joke like it did in the book. That and the big ass bird being MIA are the only things that really made me sad. Anyway, that's why beep beep Richie is an inside joke for those of you who haven't read the book. It's like a million pages long, but worth it. I hope ya'll like that I finally have some of the losers in. Now it'll feel more like a crossover. Yay!

9. Three Losers

Bill heaved a sigh as he tossed a stick as he, Richie, and Beverly headed back to the High School. The other losers were back in Derry. Ben was doing research, trying to find out as much about It as he could. Mike was stuck at his farm with his family. Eddie...well, there would have been no way in hell Eddie's mom would have let him go. Stan wanted to stay out of the situation as much as possible. Not that Bill blamed him. Stan had...never been quite the same after what had happened to them the summer before.

Due to this, it was only him, Bev, and Richie who had taken the bus ride to Hawkin's Indiana to try and find Nina.

It had gotten worse after she left. Pennywise was back, that was certain. He should have been gone for twenty-seven years, but It had come back when the rifts began to appear.

Bill didn't know what the rifts were, but Nina had a better idea. She said they were like what had opened the night she had escaped from the lab in Hawkin's, only smaller. Still, there was only one rift in Hawkins Lab. Bigger, she thought, but still...only one.

Before Nina had left there were two in Derry, hardly big enough for Eddie to squeeze into if he so chose, not that he would have. Nina said it smelled like poison on the other side so no one would have gone through it anyway. Just because no one was foolish enough to go inside the rifts...that didn't mean that nothing came out of them.

"I don't k-k-know if this is such a g-g-g-good idea," Bill said, a stutter in his voice, per the norm.

"Calm down, mush mouth," Richie jibed, giving an extra hard kick to a rock that was in his path, watching as it bounced, spun, and skidded away from them. "They said they met Nina. Just because they met her doesn't mean they know about the whole lab rat situation."

"She's n-not a l-l-l-l-lab rat, Richie," Bill said with an annoyed glare on his face. It was something he had to frequently remind Richie of. Not

that Richie actually thought of Nina as a lab rat, it was just one of his many nicknames.

"They know what she looks like, Bill," Beverly added. "The more eyes the better. I mean, you know Nina. She can hide better than anyone if she wants. We could use all the help we can get."

"Ya know," Richie said, "Maybe we should be looking for this Eleven-Jane girl. She's the one Nina came here to find. If we find her then we'll probably find Nina."

"We don't know Jane," Bev snapped. "We know Nina. I mean, Nina can find the rifts."

"Yeah, but she can't do anything about them," Richie replied snidely.

Annoyed, Bill rolled his eyes. "That's w-w-w-why Nina wanted to find h-her in the first place, dumbass."

Richie rolled his eyes and gave the rock another kick as he came up with it. "Always trashing the trash mouth."

"Whatever we do we have to do it fast before someone else goes missing," Bev said, shoving her hands in her pockets as she quickened her pace to keep up with Bill and his long legs.

"Or another hellbender comes out of one of the rifts," Richie grumbled.

Bev nodded in agreement, "Without Nina there I don't know what would happen. It's bad enough with Pennywise awake again, but you saw what those things are capable of. We have enough problems with that stupid, fucking clown at it again."

"Yeah," Richie added, kicking the rock again and adjusting his glasses as Hawkins High School came into view. "I dunno, something's different about it this time."

"You mean aside from Nina?" Bev asked.

Nina had been adopted by Doctor and Mrs. Fischer at the end of the summer and hadn't joined the loser's club until the second week after school started. Bev had only come back because her aunt had moved

to Derry so that she and Beverly wouldn't be moving back and forth during the legal proceedings after Bev's dad had died.

That was probably for the best. No one wanted to face another fight against It and whatever else was out there without Beverly, nor Nina. She was a loser now too, and they needed her. More people would die if they didn't get back, and sooner. The longer they stayed in Hawkins the worse it would be in Derry.

10. The Search Party

Jane Hopper watched Mike and the others talk amongst themselves as she waited for the phone to stop ringing. It rang. And rang. And then once more.

Finally, Flo answered on the other side of the line. Her dad was working, or at least he should have been so Flo would have been the easiest link to him.

"Hawkin's Police Department," Flo answered lazily on the other end of the line. She sounded bored. She had every right to be, though. Most of the time there was never anything of consequence happening in Hawkins so Flo had to deal with phone calls about teenagers stealing garden gnomes, dogs getting into chicken coops, crank calls, and other trivial things that these small town people could think of to report.

"Hello, Flo. It's Jane," El said from the other end of the phone. Sure, her friends and her dad still called her El, as it was a hard habit to break, but to everyone else, she was just Jane. People had wondered why Mike and the others called her El and they'd claimed that her middle name was Ellen and she liked El better than Jane. It was a lie, as she liked being called El and Jane just as well, but it did its job.

Flo's tone changed once she learned who was on the other side of the line. Flo liked Hopper's daughter very much and she couldn't deny how much good adopting the girl had done for both the girl and her new father. "Hello, Jane. Your dad's not in the office right now, hun."

"That's fine," she answered, turning around to avoid how the school's secretary watched her as she occupied the line. "Could you just tell him I'm going with my friends after school and I'll probably be at Mike's house if I'm not home by 5:15?"

"I'll tell him as soon as I can," Flo assured the girl.

El thanked Flo and disconnected the call. She gave the secretary another passing glance before leaving the office and rejoining her friends. She arrived just as Max said, "Well it wouldn't hurt to ask

her."

"Ask who what?" El asked, joining the circle and hefting her bag back up on her back.

Everyone went quiet and glanced at each other. Finally, Mike answered, sounding irritated. "They want to know if you'll find Nina with...you know."

Everyone looked down sheepishly. El hadn't used her powers to find or watch someone in a long time. She had no need anymore. She could see all of her friends in the real world if she wanted.

Plus, after how many times she'd tried to speak to someone in the black, empty place and never been able to get an answer back...well, it was all very depressing.

"You don't have to do it if you don't want to," Will said when no one spoke up, probably sensing El's hesitance.

"Yeah, it was just an idea," Dustin added.

El looked at her friends, taking in their faces and considering their request before giving them a short nod. "I can do it. Not here, though."

"Hey, it's the honorary losers!"

They looked away from each other when they heard the familiar voice and El wrinkled her nose in displeasure when she saw the boy called Richie. He looked exactly like Mike...but he wasn't Mike. Not even close. She slipped her hand into Mike's and glared at her boyfriend's doppelganger.

He wasn't alone, though. The girl named Beverly was with him too and another boy who towered at least four inches over his companions.

"S-shut the f-fuck up, Richie," the tall boy ordered, tripping over his words as he spoke. This took El aback. She'd never met someone who seemed to trip over his words the way she might trip over a rocky path.

Richie opened his mouth to speak again, but Beverly beat him to it as they finally reached them. "Hey, again," she began. "I'm...surprised you guys stuck around." She gestured to the taller boy and said, "This is Bill Denbrough,"

"We just call him Stuttering Bill, though," Richie jived, elbowing Bill playfully. "Or Mush Mouth."

"Better a m-m-m-m-mush mouth than a t-trash mouth," Bill returned.

Despite how rude their words were there was always an element of jest and fun to them.

"You remember Richie," Bev stated her tone flat.

"H-h-holy smokes," Bill said as soon as his eyes fell upon Mike. "You weren't kidding, Bev."

Mike looked at his friends awkwardly and found El's gaze. She swallowed and her grip on his hand tightened.

"I'm Mike," he said, at last, offering his hand to Bill, who shook it. "This is Jane, Will, Dustin, Lucas, and Max."

Everyone waved so nodded when they were introduced.

"So...do you guys have bikes?" Dustin asked before Richie could say something. The way he was looking at El made him a bit nervous for her.

"We stashed them not far from here," Bev answered. "We think if Nina's hiding out she'll be in the woods just...don't know this place. We really appreciate your help though."

The others nodded or shrugged, as indicated that it was no big deal, though some felt imposed upon in a big way. It was too late to back out now, though. Dustin had already said they'd help and leaving these strangers in a lurch would be a dick move.

"Can we get going?" El asked, her voice soft compared to the others'. "I need to be back by 5:15."

"We'll not delay you any longer then, dear lady," Richie said, his voice mimicking a British accent. It was pretty good too, but the abrupt change in his voice surprised everyone...everyone, but Bill and Bev.

"Come along my fellows! The game is afoot and time is wasting!"

"Does he ever shut up?" Mike asked as he and the others followed after

Richie, who was already quite a few feet in front of them.

"S-sometimes," Bill answered.

With a smirk, Bev added, "Yeah. When he's sleeping maybe."

11. The Void

The losers were well ahead of the others. Their excuse was that they were getting their bikes, which they were, but they had another purpose as well. They spoke with their voices low so that they wouldn't be detected by the local kids.

"Do you think she's the Jane that Nina came here to find?" Bev asked of Richie and Bill, glancing over her shoulder to make sure that there was still some distance between them and the others.

"I d-d-dunno," Bill answered. "Jane's a pretty common name."

"But it could be her," Richie insisted as he reached his bike, yanking it out of the underbrush.

"I think it's stupid to jump to conclusions," Bev said. "We should ask her."

"Oh fucking genius, Molly Ringwald," Richie replied before changing his voice to mimic Bev's. It wasn't spot on, but it was pretty good. "Hey, I know this is going to sound nuts, but are you a science experiment from the lab?" Yeah, Beaverly, that'd go over very well, even if she is the Jane Nina was looking for."

"Y-you're the one who sug-g-gested we look for Jane, Richie," Bill said, coming Bev's defense.

"Yeah, well I'm not so sure how well I thought that through," Richie retorted as he yanked at a stick jammed between the spokes of his tire.

"Thought what through?"

The losers jumped and turned around to see Dustin and Lucas there with their bikes. Max wasn't far behind, sulking because she was going to have to ride with Lucas instead of on her skateboard.

"My bike has sticks jammed in the wheels and it's fucking it up," Richie responded, coming up with the excuse on the fly. Richie was good at that. At least the trash mouth was good for something.

Lucas raised an eyebrow at this. "You guys curse a lot." Or at least it seemed like they cursed a lot. The Loser's Club basically said what they wanted to say in the presence of other kids. There was no way Richie would drop F-Bombs as much if his mother was there to hear it.

Then again, the Hawkins kids couldn't really get away with cursing at all. After all, Mike's dad would always tell them to cool their language even if they said things as harmless as 'douche bag'. Still, even Billy didn't swear as much as Richie did.

"Oh no, have I offended you, good sir?" Richie said in his most gallant British accent. He was particularly fond of the British guy today. "Perhaps you should put a straw within it so thou can suck it up."

Lucas just stared at Richie, like he was some sort of anomaly. Max, however, snorted with laughter. It was startling to see the differences between Mike and this Richie kid.

Before Lucas could reply Bill said, "Beep beep, Richie."

Richie, in turn, glared at Bill before casually flipping him the bird.

Meanwhile, El and Mike were hanging back, Mike telling El that she didn't have to go into the black place if she didn't want to. He was worried about her, and that honestly made her more worried about herself.

They were behind a bend in the path heading into the woods where the others couldn't see them so she reached up and gently touched his face. "I'll be okay, Mike," she assured him. "I've done this a thousand times before...I need to do it before they notice we're missing."

Mike, still looking worried, gave El a sad nod. She, in turn, gave him a gentle kiss on the cheek before slipping the makeshift blindfold made from her World History book cover over her eyes. With a breath, she slipped into the dark place.

It was about five minutes later when Richie asked, "What's taking my twin and his pretty lady so long to get here?"

"I highly doubt that Mike's your twin," Dustin replied. He knew the

Wheeler's well enough to know that they were fine off. He seriously doubted that Mr. or Mrs. Wheeler would have gotten rid of one of their kids.

"They were right behind us a little while ago," Bev added, her fingers curling around the handle of her bike.

"They're probably just off sucking face somewhere," Max suggested, crossing her arms over her chest. Despite how calm her tone was, something in her eyes was a bit worried too. It shouldn't have taken El this long...did it? Max wasn't an expert on the subject

"So...you guys think I have a shot?" Richie asked, attracting the annoyed glares of everyone around him. "I mean, clearly I'm her type."

"I seriously doubt it," Lucas said impatiently. It was so weird talking to this kid who looked exactly like Mike, except for his clothes and glasses but was otherwise absolutely nothing like him. Still, he was worried. He had every confidence in El, but he'd seen her work. It never took longer than this.

"Guys!"

Everyone looked up to see Mike running down the path towards them, very much alone and horrified. "Something's wrong!"

Max was the first to run after Mike, who had turned to run back up the hill once he had their attention. The others were slower to follow, having to ditch their bikes before they could run after them.

Richie, Bill, and Bev were the last to do so, not because they were the slowest, but because they hung back, letting Mike's friends go first.

When they arrived, the others had gathered around Jane, who had fallen on the ground, flat on her back and her eyes staring dead into the sky, two lines of blood trickling from her nose and down her cheeks.

"What's wrong with her?" Max demanded.

"Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god," Dustin said, packing

and combing his fingers through his hair as he panicked.

"Please tell me she's not dead!" Lucas demanded.

Bill calmly, but not unkindly shoved his way between Mike and Will, who both looked horrified and pale. He picked up El's wrist, which made Mike demand that Bill not touch her. It was too late, though. He had already seen the 011 tattoo on her arm.

"I fucking knew it!" Richie exclaimed, pointing at El's arm.

Bill checked her pulse and saw that it was still there. A bit weak, perhaps, but there. "She's alive," he said, gently putting her wrist down.

"She's not in the void, is she?" Bev asked.

"Void?" Mike asked.

"The b-black place," Bill answered.

"It's a place where you can see other people, but they can't see you. Like a...a two way mirror," Richie elaborated. This was the first time he'd spoken where he didn't sound like a trash mouth and it made everyone listen to me intently. "If that's where she went we could all be royally fucked up the ass."

Mike stared at the losers, lost for words. "How do you guys know about that?"

"Please tell me that's not where she is," Bev repeated.

Everyone fell quiet. Mike looked like he might cry, but he didn't. The others all looked guilty, for they had been the ones to ask her to do it.

"She was trying to find your friend," Mike answered, at last, his voice cracking.

"Son of a bitch!" Richie shouted as he took up pacing where Dustin had left off.

"Did she s-say anything before she end-d-ded up like this?" Bill asked, looking Mike dead in the eye.

Mike looked back at Bill before swallowing a hard lump in his throat.

"Steve Harrington."

"Steve?" Dustin repeated. "Steve's in Maine, though."

"We should see if he's at his parents' house first," Lucas injected, trying to keep his head on straight in this crazy situation. "I mean, she must have mentioned him for a reason."

"How do you guys know about all of this?" Max asked suspiciously

"Does that really matter right now?" Richie snapped.

"I can t-take her on my bike," Bill offered, sitting her up. "Help me, Richie."

Mike tried to stop them, but it wasn't of much use. "She can ride with me."

"Bill's got the fastest bike. Give him the address and he'll ride ahead," Bev told Mike comfortingly.

"That shitty piece of tin?" Max scoffed, gesturing to Bill's old, beat up Schwinn.

"That bike saved our asses once," Richie said as he and Bill finally got El up and straddled onto the bike. They'd have to find a way to secure her to the seat, but that wouldn't matter much.

Finally, Mike picked up his own bike and moved in to help tie El's arms around Ben's waist and her knees up around his hips so she wouldn't fall off. He gave Bill the address and directions of how to get there and was determined to keep up with them, dashing off after Bill as soon as he started, but Bev had been right. Bill's bike was too fast and Mike couldn't keep up.

omg such suspense. much scary. please don't hate me too much.

12. Homework And Hell

"How the hell are you so good at this?" Steve asked as he finally got the correct answer on his physics homework. He had only chosen the class on astrophysics because it was about outer space stuff. So far it had been more horrible than any sci-fi movie he'd ever seen.

Nina only smirked as she nibbled at an apple from off of Steve's counter. Her dress was still in the dryer so she had settle for wearing one of Steve's dad's button down shirts with a belt borrowed from Steve around her waist to keep it from flying open.

"My dad was a physicist. He taught at Husson University and he practiced giving lectures to me," she answered. "I've always been pretty good at science though. Astrophysics is just outer space with more math in it."

It wasn't a lie. She didn't add that her dad was not her birth father. At least she was pretty sure he wasn't. He and his wife had adopted her all the same. It had been the sanest and happy time of her life...at least for a time. At least that she could remember.

"Yeah, well I'm pretty sure that it's in your blood," Steve replied, glaring down at his homework.

Nina frowned a bit, "Yeah...I doubt that. I was adopted." So much for not telling him that.

"Oh," Steve said, clearly feeling a bit foolish.

Blue, who had been contently sleeping under Steve's chair as he and Nina worked on his homework at his dining room table, woke up suddenly, sitting up and alertly staring at the door. Although Nina couldn't see the dog from where she was she knew that she was awake. She and Blue were more connected than she was with other animals, probably because they'd spent to much time together. Blue hardly scratched a flea without Nina knowing about it. "What's wrong, girl?"

Steve craned his neck to look at the dog, who had eaten half of his

sausage from breakfast. Before he got a good look at her she barked and dashed for the front door. Blue was at the door and barking at it before the knock came.

Steve, thinking it was just Blue being protective of the house, rolled his eyes and went to answer the door. Nina, who knew Blue better, was suddenly very alert. She followed cautiously, her bare feet making no noise.

"What the hell?" Steve said when he answered the door to another kid. Another stranger.

He was pretty tall, not much shorter than Steve was, but he still didn't look quite like puberty had finished its work with him yet. Held in his arms was Mike Wheeler's little girlfriend, her nose bloody and her eyes staring blankly above. "What the...what're you doing with her? Who the hell are you?"

"Bill?"

Steve and Bill both looked down the corridor and saw Nina, glaring at both of them. "What the fuck, Bill!" she screamed when she saw her cousin in his arms.

"She went into the void," Bill said, forcing his way past Steve. Blue barked at him, wagging her tail at him. "Hey B-blue," he said to the dog.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Nina snarled. "Come on, put her on the sofa."

Steve, still, standing in the open doorway, stared stupidly at the kids as they put Wheeler's girlfriend on the sofa, gently putting a pillow under her head.

"Okay, what the hell is going on?" Steve asked, slamming the door behind him.

"Why did you come here, Bill?" Nina demanded, ignoring Steve's question.

"Hello!" Steve shouted, not happy to be ignored.

They ignored him anyway.

"Another r-r-rift opened u-up while you were gone," Bill stammered, lifting El's feet onto the sofa. "And two more people have gone missing."

"Son of a bitch," Nina growled, leaning over El and taking her face into her hands, staring hard at her eyes. "Goddammit," she sighed. "I have to try and get her."

"B-but you said," Bill began.

"I know what I said!" Nina screamed. As she passed Steve on her way to get or do something she said, "I need to borrow your pool, Steve."

"Not until you tell me what's going on," Steve declared.

"There's no time!" Nina yelled back as she found what she was looking for. A pair of 20-pound dumbbells. She was so slight that Steve thought she'd fall over if she picked them up, but she didn't.

There was another knock at the door before it was unceremoniously thrown open. Dustin came in first, followed shortly by Mike, Lucas, Will, Max, Mike again.

Wait...

He stopped the second Mike, staring down at him. "What the hell?" Steve asked aloud, staring at Nancy's brother, only in trashier clothes and big black rimmed glasses.

"Buy me dinner first at least, man," The second Mike quipped, ripping his arm away and joining the rest of the kids who had invaded his house.

He found himself regretting not calling the cops on Nina, but she had been a cool kid. He didn't think that it would come to this. He wasn't going to just NOT call the cops now. If Hopper found out that Steve had his kid here and she looked half dead and he didn't tell the cops then it would be his ass.

"Nina," another girl called out when she entered. At first, Steve

thought it was another Max, but upon further reflection, the girl looked nothing like Max, aside from the red hair, though hers was shorter than Max's. She was also taller and more feminine looking than Max was.

"Not now, Bev," Nina retorted as she stormed towards the pool, the hand weights tight in her fists.

Steve threw his hands in the air and was in the process of calling the cops when he heard the splash of Nina jumping into the pool with the weights in hand.

13. Maturin

Nina had always been very calm and took her time whenever she went into the void. However, things were different this time. The last time Nina had gone into the void she had almost not come back out. It wasn't all black and dark anymore.

Now...there were lights. Bright, intoxicating and terrible lights. She had almost lost herself in them. Bev, who had also seen the lights once before, had almost lost herself in them too. Lost in the dead lights. She hadn't been told that that's what they were called, but that's how they felt. Lights of death.

She didn't expect that she had all the words right. In fact, she was sure she hadn't. After all, the turtle had informed her not once, but twice that what she called the void was actually the macroverse. She didn't care, though. She thought The Void had a better ring to it.

Before the rifts had started opening Nina had never had such trouble with deadlights, but the turtle said that the lights were a bit more...unpredictable than they had been before.

There was too much for it to all really understand. Nina knew one thing, though. Jane would be lucky to get out of the void with her senses still intact.

She kept her eyes down when she drew closer to Jane so that she wouldn't look at them by mistake. Seeing them once was more than enough. She could see Jane's feet and she experimentally reached for her cousin's hand. She'd never made any contact with another person INSIDE the Void. She could touch the turtle though so she hoped that she would be able to do the same with Eleven.

Her hand made contact with the other girl's hand and she heaved a relieved sigh. Still keeping her eyes down and avoiding looking at her cousin she put her hands on the other girl's face, found her eyes, and gently pushed the lids shut. That done, she pushed her gently. That was all it took to get Eleven to follow direction.

Ushering the other girl along, Nina only looked up when the glow

from the deadlights faded. Surrounded by darkness wasn't much better. There was a constant mystery in darkness.

She knew that Pennywise could come into the void, but after a discussion with Maturin, she learned that Pennywise wasn't exactly fond of the void so it wasn't all too likely. There was nothing in the void that Pennywise could consume. Everything was just...too big.

Maturin had shown her the tower, the other universes and how the void reached to them. She was horrified by these worlds and tried to not think about them.

Still, she couldn't be too surprised. All it did was prove the many world interpretation right. What could she do with that, though? 'Yes, I know there are other universes because I've seen them when I slip into a meditative state'. Yeah, that was a good way to get laughed out of the scientific community.

"Jane?" Nina asked, pulling her cousin's hands into her own.

No answer.

She frowned and gently put her fingers on Eleven's sternum and gave her a gentle, but firm shove back. In turn, Eleven teetered backward and, before she could fall over, came forward again, settling when she was centered.

"She's a bit stuck, isn't she?"

Nina jumped and spun around when she heard the voice, but she heaved a relieved sigh when she saw that it was only Maturin.

Now, the largest turtle Nina had ever seen before meeting Maturin was a snapping turtle. It was an impressive creature, but Maturin was larger than any turtle on earth. He was larger than the earth itself. The only reason she was able to see as much of him as she could, which was his face and not much else, was because he altered her perception of him whenever their paths. "You scared me, Maturin."

"I will not always be here when you are foolish enough to come where the deadlights wander," he chided her. Still, his voice was kind.

"Can you help her?" she asked, putting a hand on Eleven's shoulder before looking back up into the turtle's massive blue eyes, which were surrounded by thick and green scaly skin.

Maturin studied Eleven for a moment before saying, "I believe I can bring her back, but she will not forget it all. However, I sense that she is strong like you and your friend, Beverly, were."

"Where she and I were kept you had to be strong or you wouldn't survive," Nina answered, glancing at her cousin again.

The giant turtle might have nodded, but it was a slow and barely detectable motion. "Would you sing to me while I work, child?"

Nina nodded, "Of course." He had helped her before with the deadlights. If it hadn't been for him she probably would have lost her life, or her mind, in those lights. He had simple pleasures. Apparently, he'd never met someone who sang the way she did.

She'd been taught to sing back in Hawkins when one of the scientists noticed that if she sang then animals would flock to her. They taught her...just about everything about singing. It was probably the only thing she hadn't hated about that place. Still, she had wanted to go to school. She wanted to see the stars. She wanted very simple things that she had to take by her own means, but that was unimportant for the time being.

As the turtle worked, though it didn't look like he was doing anything, Nina sang him an old aria from an opera. She didn't know what the words meant, but it sounded nice.

She was about halfway done when Eleven gasped loudly and blinked. When she saw the turtle she started to stumble backward.

Nina stopped singing midword and took her cousin's hand, the contact in the void surprising El enough that it made her stop. "It's okay!" she exclaimed. "It's okay, that's just Maturin."

El opened and closed her mouth a few times like she was trying to figure out what to say. Finally, she repeated, "Maturin?"

"A friend," Maturin informed El kindly.

"Friend," El repeated, though she didn't seem entirely convinced.

"Kid?" a new voice echoed through the void. "Kid, are you in there?"

El and Nina looked around for the source of the voice, but it was not there. "Dad?" El asked warily. It was then that Nina realized it was the voice of the policeman she had given the files to.

"Yeah, kid, it's me," the man said, relief plain in his voice.

"El?" this voice belonged to Mike. "El, can you wake up?"

"Mike," Eleven sighed, smiling slightly. "I think so."

"Go to your friends now, little friend," Maturin said to Eleven kindly.

"You should rest for a day or two if you can."

"Thank you," Eleven said, looking up to look Maturin in the eye. Then she realized something and turned to face Nina and asked, "How did you get here?"

Without hesitation, Nina pulled up the sleeve of her dress, which was really just an oversized button up shirt and showed Eleven the number on her arm. "I'm like you," she answered. "We can talk about this more when I come out of here."

"El?" Mike's voice echoed through the void again.

Nina nodded at El and finally, she vanished leaving Nina alone with only Maturin.

"Before you go, little one," the turtle said, "I have a gift for you."

"Oh," Nina began, "Maturin, I don't know if I can take anything else from you. You've done too much for me."

"Child," the turtle said, his voice so stern that it made her go silent. "You have given me gifts. I wish to return the favor."

"I've never given you a gift, Maturin," Nina said, trying to convince him otherwise. She knew that Maturin had created the universe.

Their universe anyway. He claimed it was only because he'd gotten a stomach ache, but still...he had created the universe. The idea of getting a gift from someone (or something) powerful enough to do that was nothing to sneeze at.

It terrified her.

"I know the words that will release your memory," he told her.

If he could smile Nina was sure he would have been giving her a knowing smirk. "Are you certain you don't want to know who you are? Where you come from?"

She froze. He had her attention.

if you aren't a reader of the It novel, something which I seriously suggest you the remedy, but to each their own, you probably won't recognize the Turtle, but he's kind of like the Batman to Pennywise's Joker. I know I'm fixating a lot on Nina, but in the next chapter, I'm sure you'll see why.
wink wink nudge nudge

14. Awaken

El gasped when she came back into the real world from the black one like she had been under water and needed to emerge for a breath. She took a few deep breaths before looking up and realizing that everyone was standing over her, looking down at her in concern.

Joyce had arrived with Hopper and Nancy and Jonathan, who had been at the Byers' house when Joyce started to leave. When they heard what had happened they'd decided to come along. It was a bit tense with Steve...it always was, but they had managed to be friends at least.

"Kid?" her dad asked, eyes fixed on her, focusing on her movements.

Mike stood next to him, staring and most likely holding his certainly looked like he wasn't breathing.

"Dad?" she said her throat and dry like she'd been screaming.

Hopper grinned down at her and Mike released the breath he probably didn't even realize he was holding in. The two of them folded El into a big hug and Joyce heaved a sigh, holding her hand against her chest.

"Where's Nina?" El asked after Hopper and Mike released her.

"She's cutting it pretty fucking close is where she is," Richie snapped as he stormed back into the living room to check the clock before storming back out to the pool.

Nancy stared after Richie, still unable to wrap her head around the idea of another kid who looked exactly like Mike. She wasn't sure if she'd ever get used to this Richie kid.

Bev, who was sitting on the floor, out of the way, but she leaned forward when she saw that El was awake now. "Are you okay?"

El looked at Bev and nodded slowly. "Yeah...I think. My brain is just..."

"I know," Bev said. "I've seen the deadlights too."

"Deadlights?" Joyce echoed looking down at the other girl.

"It's like..." El began to explain. However, she didn't get any farther than that before she gave up on explaining the lights, shaking her head and looking down.

"Like what?" Dustin pressed.

Bev stood up and moved over to sit next to El. "It's hard to explain."

El nodded, confirming Bev's words.

"What exactly is Nina doing?" Steve asked, glancing at the pool.

"She saved me," El said.

"She threatened you last night," Hopper countered, scowling at the pool.

"How is she not dead, though?" Steve said, ignoring Hopper's accusation. "She's been under the water for, like, twenty minutes."

Bill, who had just come back in from checking on Nina, hadn't missed the accusation, though. "S-she can hold her b-b-breath a long t-time."

"Twenty minutes?" Steve challenged. However, his query went ignored.

Bill glazed over Steve's concern before leering at Hopper. "What do you m-m-mean she threatened her?"

El looked confused and concerned. She couldn't see why Nina would threaten her. They were one and the same. Were they sisters like she and Kali were?

No, that didn't seem quite right. Still, they were something. She couldn't remember, though. She couldn't understand why she couldn't remember the others from Hawkins Lab. Obviously, there had been others. Kali, and now Nina, were evidence of this. Why couldn't she remember them, though?

"She gave me files about the other kids from Hawkins," Hopper informed the boy. He didn't know this boy. He didn't trust him, but...he seemed to know already so there was no point in keeping it to himself. "Apparently, Nina was one of them."

"She has the tattoo," El said, leaning into Mike, who had moved to sit beside her. "I don't think she'd threaten me."

Bev, scowling and glaring at Hopper, spat, "She didn't come here to threaten anyone. She came to ask for help."

"People back home are d-dying," Bill added firmly.

"I'm sure the cops can handle it," Hopper retorted. "You kids should keep your noses out of this."

"Yeah, like they've handled the countless 'missing' person cases," Bev retorted. "With all due respect, Officer Copper,"

"Hopper," the police chief corrected sternly.

Bev ignored him and continued, "Just last summer we had, what was it, nineteen people who just...disappeared."

"The first one was my little brother," Bill added.

"Nineteen?" Joyce repeated, horrified. "Wouldn't that...make national news?"

"From Derry?" Bill deadpanned. "No. People tend to just...forget that those people existed after they vanished."

"Forget?" Hopper repeated dubiously.

Bev scoffed and rolled her eyes, "I doubt you'd believe us or understand."

Jim Hopper scratched the back of his neck and said, "I dunno. I've seen stranger things."

"Stranger than the statistics in people going missing being more than six times the national average?" Bev challenged.

"Stranger than b-balloons that float in-t-to the wind?" Bill added.

"Photographs that move," Bev said, though she wasn't questioning now...just remembering.

"And t-talk," Bill added.

"You mean, like...movies?" Jonathan asked.

"We're not stupid," Bev shot back. "We know the difference between a photo in a photo album moving and talking as opposed to a movie."

"Why wouldn't anyone do anything about it?" Hopper asked. "It all sounds pretty far-fetched."

"They don't want to see it so they don't," Bev said. "My bathroom was covered wall to ceiling to floor in blood. Do you understand? Blood. My dad came in because he heard me screaming, but he couldn't see a goddamn thing."

"Blood?" Nancy and Joyce asked in unison.

"Don't k-k-keep fighting it, Bev. They d-don't believe us anyway." Bill said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"That doesn't explain why you'd come here," Hopper barked. A normal, calm life was all he wanted anymore. Was that really so much to ask?

"The doors."

Everyone looked up when they heard Nina's voice. She was still drenched head to toe. She'd wrung out her hair and her makeshift dress, but she was still dripping on the floor.

Hopper was very aware that the girl was staring at him like he was some fascinating thing that had captured her attention. Something new. All of this despite the fact that they had met just the night before. It made him clear his throat and to try and make her notice she was making him uncomfortable, or at least make her stop looking at him like she was. "What doors?"

"You don't see me," she said, her voice distant and quiet.

Hopper raised an eyebrow at her, "We can see you fine...what doors?"

Nina didn't answer at first. Richie cautiously reached out to touch her nose to try and get her to snap out of it. "Hey, NeeNee?"

She slapped his hand away, her reflexes fast as always.

"Sorry," she said, shaking her head and averting her eyes. "Um, the hole or rift or...whatever that opened the night I ran away. There are doors like that, but...but smaller in Derry."

"To the upside down?" El asked.

Nina raised an eyebrow at this. At her cousin. At the policeman's daughter...his daughter. "I don't know what it's called. I've never been there."

"We've seen some of the things that live there, though," Richie supplied. "I'm telling you, they're some weird looking fucks."

Nina gave him a look out of the corner of her eye. "Beep beep, Richie."

Richie rolled his eyes but silenced.

"If that's the case and you came here asking for help why did you give me those damn files instead of just being honest?" Hopper demanded.

She looked back at him and found her stomach tying in knots. She wanted nothing more than to go straight back into the water and drown herself. Something in her broke with how he looked at her.

Looked, but didn't see.

"I gave you all I have," she answered. "All I know."

'Or knew,' she thought to herself. That wasn't true. Not anymore. Still, how could she tell him that when he didn't SEE her?

"I wanted you to understand where I came from and how I knew," she finished, casting her eyes down. "It was a stupid idea. "We'll...take

care of it ourselves."

"What?" Richie, Bev, and Bill blurted out in unison.

"Nina, you said so yourself, you can't close those doors," Bev said, standing up and moving towards her friend.

"And they're getting b-b-bigger," Bill added.

"On top of that, that fucking clown is still out there," Richie finished.

"I'll do it," El said before they could argue anymore.

"Finally someone with sense!" Richie exclaimed with a grin.

Nina froze and stared back at the girl, "What?"

"I'll go," El repeated.

"Like hell, you will," Hopper growled.

"I opened the gate," El informed him. "I need to close them."

Everyone started planning, all of them volunteering go. Will volunteered to go and Jonathan and Joyce started in on how he would do no such thing. The same thing happened with Nancy when Mike said he was going. Max said she wanted to go and Lucas argued about how they were not going to do that. It looked like she was going to win that lover's spat. Dustin exclaimed that it was time for a road trip and Steve ripped into him about how he shouldn't be a dumbass. Bev, Richie, and Bill started to ramble about what to do next. If they should catch the bus again.

Nina, however, was silent, trying to be subtle she watched toe policeman arguing with El, still trying to convince her not to go. She had called him dad.

It wasn't that she wanted either of them to be unhappy. He wasn't wearing his wedding ring anymore. He had grown out his facial hair.

He was changed...it was probably her fault.

She had taken Maturin up on his offer. That's what had taken her so long in getting back. She saw him now. A man who had played tag with her sat for tea parties with her, he would pick her up and spin her around like she weighed nothing. He was so big and strong to her.

She could see him now, but he didn't see her. She glanced back at her friends and had to fight the urge to tell them that she knew her name now. She knew who she was and where she came from. It was a secret that bubbled in her, begging to jump out of her mouth and into the air.

Still, it didn't seem like this was the right time to announce that her name wasn't Nina.

It was Sara. Sara Genevive Hopper.

I bet you guys thought Nina was an original character. Don't you feel foolish? :P Confession time: It took like 8 years to find a middle name for her I liked.

15. Interogations Part 1

Everyone found their way around Steve's dining room table, which had still been heavily laden with his homework. Still, he cleared it away and started to play host to everyone there. He didn't seem thrilled about it, but Steve was anything but inhospitable in these seemed to be all too familiar now.

Steve got some sodas out for the kids and they all took one except for El, Bev, Bill, and Nina. El didn't think she could stomach a soda and the others felt like they might be imposing by accepting. Richie, on the other hand, finished two sodas by the time the discussion was at its end. He offered a coke to Nancy and Jonathan too, but they opted to drink coffee like Hopper and Joyce were.

The Harrington dining room table was long enough to play host to a few more people than there were present, but they managed to fill the table in two very uneven halves. On one side was him and the rest of the Hawkins residents. On the other side was Nina, Bev, Bill, and Richie, looking small and outnumbered compared to the others. Like a team of four up against a team of...eleven. Five if you counted the dog, which Steve didn't, as she was outside chasing squirrels.

Still, Steve was curious and wanted answers from these weird kids as much as Hopper did. They had all agreed on how this discussion would go. Each side wanted answers so each side had to give an answer to get one back. It seemed fair. However, no one wanted to make the first move.

Finally, Eleven spoke up, leaning into the table to get a better look at these kids from Derry. "How did you get the files?" she asked, the question directed at Nina.

Nina froze at being addressed by Eleven, the girl her father had chosen to replace her.

'Stop that,' Nina thought to herself, not liking that she was obviously jealous of this girl. She had no reason to be, though. She could understand how Eleven and Hopper might have found each other and she couldn't fault them for that. Her dad probably thought she was

dead.

Still...it hurt.

Trying to hide her thoughts she answered, "Well, I could hear the rift opening up," she began.

"You heard it?" her dad repeated.

She nodded, not meeting his eyes. "My abilities are different than Jane's."

"You can call me El," Eleven said with a small smile. "My friends call me El."

Nina swallowed a lump in her throat and said, "Thanks. Um...well was in a session with mama."

"Mama?" El repeated.

"I doubt you remember her," Nina said. "You should consider yourself lucky."

"Papa was no treat," El said, glaring at her hands, which were folded atop the table.

"Oh I know," Nina said, shaking her head. "Mama's simply who primarily handled me. They used to have all of us together in our down time so we could at least have some form of social interaction...at first."

El shook her head at this. "I don't remember."

"I'm not surprised," Nina replied. "They have this...room. It does something with lights and sounds...that's vague, I know, but I remember very little of it. As I got older they needed to sedate me to get me into that room so it's all...blurry."

"How is it that you can remember some things, but El can't?" Mike asked.

Richie shot back, "Hey! Only one question at a time."

Nina glared at Richie, "Richie, shut up. It's a question in another question."

"He's breaking the rules!" Richie exclaimed.

"And you are breaking my patience," Nina growled. Richie began to speak again and Nina grabbed his wrist with one hand and yanked one of his fingers back, hard. Not hard enough to break it, but hard enough to shut him up. It surprised everyone but Bev and Bill to see that Richie couldn't pull away. Nina was much stronger than someone so slight had any right. "Shut...up."

She released him and Richie sat back, flexing his hand to try and get the ache out of it. "Goddammit, dude, are you on your period?"

Nina shot to her feet and Richie pulled away, looking genuinely horrified. Bill was up too, wrapping his arms around her from behind and stopping her from advancing on Richie. She was making no effort to do so, but they both felt better with Bill restraining her. Nina was rarely ever sensitive like this. She could be as bad of a trash mouth as Richie sometimes. She and Richie were actually very close. Maybe closer than she was with any of the other losers. "Nina, what's wrong?" Bill asked.

She glanced over her shoulder at Bill, who was giving her a very worried look. She worked at a knot in her throat and sat down. She needed to tell someone that she was Officer Hopper's daughter. His real daughter. It was going to drive her nuts. It already was. Still, she had gotten close enough with the losers for them to all know that she would tell them...just not now. Bill let her go and she sat back down. She gave Richie a wary look and gave him a weak, yet sincere apology.

In turn, Richie shrugged, acting like she hadn't scared the pants right off of him. "It's fine. That period stuff was pretty gross."

"Not as gross as Mrs. Kaspbrak's periods," she countered, unable to stop the ghost of a smile playing on her mouth.

Bev winced at this and said, "Gross."

Richie, however, roared with laughter.

Nina sighed and turned back to the others. "I'm sorry...where was I?"

"Um," Mike hesitated before repeating, "Why can't El remember anything, but you can?"

"Right," Nina nodded and began, "The process...I really don't understand it. I know very little about neuroscience, but they would drill a very small hole right about...here," she found the place in her skull with a tiny, barely noticeable dent in her head. She nodded at El and said, "You probably have one too. It shouldn't be any bigger than maybe...three or four centimeters across."

Experimentally, El reached back and found a tiny indent where Nina had her finger. She must have touched it a thousand times not thinking it was anything important. She didn't like it and she pulled her hand away the minute she found it.

"That's about where the prefrontal cortex is...I mean, I think. I'm pretty sure. Brains aren't really my thing, but they'd inject some fluid in there. Mind you, I'm just spitballing here so I can't really explain it all."

"Jesus Christ, lab rat, this isn't a science class," Richie juttet in. "Just tell them they shot some juice in your head and did some shit and it fucked up your memories, but they'd manipulate what stayed and went."

Nina rolled her eyes at this, "I was getting to that."

"Okay, well...they'd do this and it would mess with your memory," Nancy said. "Why do you remember things then?"

"I wasn't in that hell hole from the get-go," Nina answered. "I had a life before, but the first thing I remember is waking up on a cold, metal table in a hospital gown with manacles on my wrists and ankles. They had to try and screw with my head a lot. The more they did it the less it worked."

"You developed an immunity to it," Dustin simplified. She nodded and he smiled at her.

Officer Hopper got them back to the original question, eager to move this along, "Alright, so you were in a session with this...mama when you heard the rift opening. How did you get out of there?"

"A wise man once told me to not show all your cards when you don't know who you're playing with," Nina said.

This caught Hopper's attention. "Who told you that?"

'You did,' she thought, but she didn't say that. Instead, she shrugged, "I dunno. Anyway, I saw an opportunity to get out of there. Everything was in chaos. I could hear...chaos and fear was so thick on the air I could have choked on it." She swallowed a lump in her throat and glanced at Bill, who already knew what came next. "Anyway...I didn't mean to kill her."

"You killed her?" Steve exclaimed.

"I'm not sorry for it, either," Nina announced.

"I would have killed her too," Bev added.

"Anyway," Nina said, trying to continue the conversation, "I broke into her office and grabbed my file. I was in a hurry so I didn't realize that most of my file was gone, nor that I had grabbed file Ten and Eleven too."

"What happened to Ten?" Lucas asked.

Nina shrugged, "I don't know. Only that she's dead. After I had the files I got the hell out of there. Ran until my feet turned bloody. Didn't stop until I reached New Jersey. That's where I found Blue, but...that's another story. Eventually, I stopped in Maine."

"Our turn," Richie said before his longwinded friend could continue. "Now, you guys have closed one of these doors before, right?"

El nodded, "Yes. I can close them."

Bev and Bill both heaved relieved sighs at this.

"Good. Shit's getting weird back home with the hell bender's and the

other on top of Pennywise."

The table across from them rang with two questions, some asking what Pennywise was, what the other was, and what hellbenders were.

The losers began to explain Pennywise as best as they could. They explained that he was a shapeshifter, he could screw with your memories and he lived by eating people who were well marinated in their own fear. They left it at that, though, sure that Ben and their own Mike could explain it better, the both of them knowing the town's history better than the others.

The other was harder to explain, but when Nina started in on how it was a hive mind that wanted to take over the lifeforms on earth Dustin and Will both looked at each other and said, "The Mind Flayer."

"Mind Flayer?" Bill asked.

The Hawkins' residents left explaining that up to Will, since he knew it best. With that done, Richie said, "Mind Flayer is a way more badass name than 'the other'. I move to change the name from 'the other' to 'The Mind Flayer'."

"Seconded," Nina chimed in.

Bev shrugged and raised her own hand and Bill said, "F-fine, we'll let the others know when we get back. If no one else will vote for the change then S-stan will at least. He doesn't r-really care about much any-m-more."

"Plus it's nice actually having a real name for something," Bev added.

"What about Hellbenders?" Dustin asked.

"I could probably draw one," Nina offered. "It'll look like crap, but it'll give the basic idea."

Before anyone could oppose, Steve ripped a page out of his notebook and gave it to her along with a pencil. As she sketched Richie occasionally pointed out where she was going wrong. Every time she

would silently glare at him, he'd give her an unapologetic smile, and she would continue.

When she finished and pushed the paper to the group on the other side they all gathered around to see what she had put onto paper. They started at it in confusion, disbelief, and, in some cases, horror.

"You've got to be kidding me," Steve finally said, breaking the silence that had fallen upon them.

Alright, so this chapter turned out to be REALLY long so this is..maybe a bit more than half of what it was originally meant to be. Fret not, the rest shall follow. Happy Thanksgiving to my fellow Americans and...happy Thursday to everyone else. This chapter and the next one are going to be mostly clearing up any confusion so that they're all a bit more confident about joining forces. Anyway, leave me a review if you'd like. Night everyone!

16. Interrogations Part 2

"That's a demodog!" Dustin exclaimed, pulling the picture close to him and staring at it in shock. There was no way these kids could have been known what a demodog was without having seen one in the flesh. They weren't exactly an easy creature to imagine.

"Demodog?" Bev repeated.

"That's a hellbender," Nina repeated.

Lucas took the drawing and looked it over. "I mean...it does look like Dart, but"

"Dart?" Richie asked.

"This idiot," Lucas began, gesturing at Dustin, "decided that it might be a good idea to keep one of these little monsters as a pet."

"I get it, Lucas, I was stupid," Dustin exclaimed.

"Wait," Nina began, "Go back...you wanted to keep a hellbender,"

"He was a baby demodog," Dustin interrupted.

"Baby or not," Nina began, "If it was connected with the other,"

"The mind flayer," Richie reminded her, enjoying the way the word rolled off his tongue.

"Right," Nina said before continuing, "If it was connected with the mind flayer then it would be...stupid, to say the least, to keep one as a pet."

"I mean, we have three in Derry," Richie added, "but that's different."

"Shut up, Richie!" Bev ordered, giving her friend a hard punch on the shoulder.

Richie flipped her off, but no one seemed to notice.

"You have...three of these hellbenders," Hopper began. "Like...they're running amuck?"

"They...were," Nina began. She looked at her friends before heaving a sigh and saying, "I guess you might as well know. They were connected to the mind flayer, but...well...I'm...good with animals."

"Yeah, you're 'good' with animals. And Michael Jackson's poor as shit," Richie countered.

Nina rolled her eyes, "Beep beep Richie. It's not exactly easy to explain."

Before anyone could stop him Richie said. "She severed the link between them and they formed a bond with her and now they're like our motherfucking guard dogs. She's got a hive mind of her own and she's the brain of it!"

"Yeah, and I was unconscious for like four days after," Nina countered. "It's not as badass as you make it out to be."

"I think you're missing the point," Dustin said, staring at Nina in awe. "They have demodogs."

"I think you're missing the point," Will countered, looking back at Nina with horror on his face. "You're a hive mind just like him!"

"No!" Nina said, her words too sharp. "I would never be like him. I mean...with animals it sort of just happens."

"She can talk to them," Richie jumped in, "With her mind!"

Dustin gave her a befuddled look, "Like...Doctor Doolittle?"

"Not...exactly," Nina said. She glared at Richie and said, "I swear to god if you don't shut up for once in your life I'll beat the living shit out of you. What did I just say about not showing our whole hand? Who's to say they aren't going to drag me right back to those assholes who ran that shitshow?"

"Sweetie, we would never do that," Joyce assured her. "We promise, you'll be perfectly safe."

"I haven't been safe since I was a kid," she countered. "I don't mean to be rude, but you can't really fault me for not trusting you guys unconditionally and flapping my mouth like Richie here. I know we're just kids, but this is serious."

Richie shrugged, "Just because I'm trusting and pure."

"PURE!" Bev exclaimed before she started laughing at this. Nina and Bill tried to contain their amusement, but before long they were laughing as well.

"So when he says you have a hive mind," Joyce began when the kids started to calm down, "What exactly does that mean?"

"It's usually with animals," Nina explained. "Before I left Hawkins mama was trying to get me to learn how to do it with humans. I've only done it a few times, and I've hated it."

"She did it to keep the other...the mind flayer from taking over our minds," Bev explained.

"She threw up and cried for half an hour after," Richie added.

Nina glared at Richie, "Is it really necessary to share that? Humans are complicated and I feel... aren't so...chaotic. I have my own feelings and thoughts that are confusing. Having to deal with just one more human in my head is a pain in the ass. Is it so terrible that I hate it? You know perfectly well the only reason I even."

"It's okay, Nina," Bill said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

She heaved a sigh to get control of herself and continued, "If I have someone's head in mine then the mind flayer can't take control of them."

"What about you?" Will asked.

"Oh," Nina said, brushing her hair behind her shoulder. "Well, he can't get in my head. He's tried."

"Well, it's not fun. I can tell you for sure, its no fun," Will added.

"Wait a minute," Bev said, "you've had the other-

"The mind flayer!" Richie exclaimed.

Bev rolled her eyes and reached over to shove Richie's head gently.

"Yeah, we had to get it out of him before Jane could shut the door," Joyce explained. "If we hadn't then shutting the door would have killed him."

"You g-got it out of him?" Bill asked.

The others nodded and Nina asked, "How?"

"We had to sweat it out of him," Jonathan explained.

"It was pretty intense," Nancy added, pushing her hair behind her ear.

"But...you did it?" Nina repeated. "You got the mind flayer out?"

"It sure seems that way," Hopper answered.

Swallowing a lump in her throat Nina turned to face Bill, "That means we can get him out of her."

"It w-won't be easy," Bill replied.

"We'll help, though," Richie said. "Mrs. Fischer's really had a tough shake so if we can get that smoke spider shithead out of her we need to do it."

"It possessed someone else?" Will asked.

Nina glanced at her friends and hesitated a moment before she said, "Yes...my mom. My adoptive mom. Everyone thinks she's just being eccentric because of her husband going...missing."

She gave her friends a knowing look and they all went quiet. They all knew very well what had happened to her adoptive father. Richie, Bev, and Ben had been there with her when it happened. Pennywise had dragged him into the sewers and even with Nina and her friends trying to pull him out, but they hadn't been able to get him free. It

had taken all three of her friends to stop her from diving into the sewer after him. He had died screaming.

"Just missing?" Hopper pressed, rightly detecting that there was more to it than just that. '

"It's...not important," Nina said. In reality, she just didn't want to talk about it.

Hopper shrugged, but he wasn't fooled. "Alright, fine, well I still don't see why we should go to this...Carrie, Maine."

"It's Derry," Richie said shortly. "And if you've dealt with the mind flayer then I don't know why you would willingly sit back and just not help."

"I honestly think I might have had enough excitement to last me a lifetime," Nancy admitted, sipping her coffee and shaking her head.

"But you know about the mind flayer," Bev said, leaning forward and putting her elbows on the table. "If you've seen it once before then I don't know why you'd be content to sit back and just see what happens."

"I mean, the dream is that Pennywise and the mind flayer will eventually kill each other," Richie added. "I don't think that's too likely though."

"They're both arrogant pieces of shit," Nina said. "They both think they're the oldest and most eternal things in the universe, but they're both wrong."

"You say that like you know what the oldest and most eternal thing is in the universe is," Lucas challenged.

"I know a lot of things," Nina admitted. "It's really not always all it's cracked up to be."

"I have another question for you," El admitted sheepishly.

"Okay," Nina said. She still was incredibly jealous of El and she hated herself a bit for it. She knew she had to right to be, but this was all a

very new and confusing circumstance. She was just looking forward to when she could talk to her friends about it. Talking to the losers always made her feel better, but now wasn't the time or place.

"You're very smart," El stated, glancing at Mike nervously. He took her hand under the table and El drew some confidence from that.

"Thank you?" Nina said. Her tone indicated that the expression of gratitude was actually a question, and it was. El had said she had a question. Saying that Nina was smart wasn't really a question.

"I was just wondering...how," El continued. "I mean, you seem to know a lot and I'm still figuring the world out."

"Oh," Nina said, thinking she understood the question. "Well it's mostly because of mice and solitary confinement."

"Mice?" El repeated.

"Yeah," Nina continued. "I have a pretty good range when it comes to animals, at least. There are lots more mice in schools than people would think so I would kind of...borrow their point of view and sit in on lessons because I couldn't go to school. I never made friends or anything, but it was the next best thing and I learned what I could. I was in solitary a lot for the past two years so I used it to my advantage."

"That's...very clever, actually," El said. She wished she had thought of something like that, but she didn't even know about school or anything in the outside world so she wouldn't have even known what to look for.

"You guys don't h-h-have to decide right n-now if you want to help," Bill said, feeling that their discussions were coming to a close. "We cant talk more about it t-tomorrow." He got up and the other losers followed suit. "We'll meet you guys...somewhere."

Steve raised an eyebrow at this, "Where are you guys going to go?"

"We can camp out in the woods," Bev said.

Steve shook his head at this, "No. My parents are going to be gone for

like a week. You can just crash here."

Dustin smiled mischievously, "We could ALL have a sleepover her."

Steve tried to look stern, but he smirked and shook his head at Dustin. "Call your parents if you're staying then...but let me order pizza first."

A cheer of agreement rose up from the other side of the table and the adults (and Nancy and Jonathan) smirked and shook their heads at this.

While everyone was distracted, Nina got her friends' attention and gestured to the back door, implying she wanted some privacy to talk to them. They all knew that they were being watched as they walked out, but they assured Steve they wouldn't leave his yard when he repeated that they were not sleeping in the woods.

Nina was the last to leave the house, shutting the door behind her and heaving a sigh before moving to join her friends around the pool. She was scared still, but also very ready to tell them what she had learned.

HOLY crap these past two chapters...I'm really glad I didn't decide to put this all in one chapter. It would have been a very long chapter.

17. Will's Choice

"So she was washing her hair in your pool?" Dustin asked as the chief craned his neck to get a better look at the kids out back through the window. They were all sitting on the edge of the pool with their feet in the water, the boys with their jeans rolled up to their knees to avoid getting their clothes wet. The girls didn't have to worry about it, though. Nina was still in her makeshift dress, which was still wet, and Bev was wearing a pair of shorts.

He didn't think that the kids were lying. How could they be? They knew too much about the Mind Flayer and the demodogs...or hellbenders. That just made him more wary of her, though.

"I thought she was a runaway or something," Steve explained. "I guess I figured if I let her stick around and calm down a bit I could talk her into going back home. I didn't think she was like Eleven. If I had I probably would have left her alone." He realized what he said and added, "No offense, it's just...you know?"

El shrugged, implying that she didn't care and she understood.

"Either way," Will interjected, "If what they're saying is true and the Mind Flayer has a way back into our world...he won't stop until he's taken over everything. I know his head as well as he knows mine and I know that our only chances are to fight or just...let him take everything."

"I dunno," Nancy said. "I mean, she said she could do what the mind flayer does. That makes her dangerous."

"Yeah, but she also said she hated it," Dustin added.

"She could have been lying, Dustin," Lucas countered, planting his hands on his hips and giving his friend an exasperated look.

"I don't think so," El said, taking another sip of her water. "Papa tried to make me do terrible things too. He made me spy on people...hurt them. In those situations, you either hurt and spied or you got hurt."

"She's made it clear that she's different than you, though," Lucas countered. "I mean, who's to say she's not in league with the mind flayer?"

"Who's to say she isn't just making all of this up?" Max snapped back. "I mean, she's good with her pet. Aside from that, she hasn't proven to be anything special or dangerous."

"She has the tattoo," Joyce said. "She got all those files. I mean...it seems like a lot to go through to prove that she came from the lab."

"She did come from the lab," El stated. "She went into the dark place and found me there. She has something."

"Well...we could always ask her," Will suggested.

"Ask her to go into our brains?" Mike asked his face in a grimace at the idea.

"Was I the only one listening when she said she hated doing that?" Dustin asked.

The chief moved away, rubbing his mouth and moving away from the window, "I dunno...I mean, Will said that he knows the mind flayer as well as it knows him. If that's the case then we could see into her head."

"It wouldn't hurt to ask," Max suggested with shrug.

"Who should we have her...you know?" Mike asked nervously.

"I'll do it," Will volunteered before anyone could beat him to it.

"Sweetie, no!" Joyce exclaimed once the words had been set free.

Hopper heaved an annoyed sigh and said, "Kid, you've been through enough with this crap."

"Exactly," Will replied. "I already know what it's like. Out of all of us...I'm the best person for this."

More people tried to talk him out of it, but Will threw his hands up to

silence them. "Shut up, everyone! As soon as they come back in here this is happening...now let's order some pizza. Try to be normal."

No one was happy with Will's decision, but they all knew an uphill battle when they saw one so, per his suggestion, they started to get ready to order pizza and try to at least pretend to be normal.

18. Sidebar

"Jesus Christ," Bev said, taking a drag on her cigarette and passing it to Nina...no...Sara. Sara needed it more.

Sara took the cigarette between her middle and index finger and took a long pull on it. If her old voice teacher from the lab knew that she was smoking she would have had a field day. Still, Sara didn't care. The only thing that the singing had ever accomplished was getting animals' attention. She supposed it might work with people, but she'd never tried it. Never needed to. It was basically just an advanced form of kulning...not that she knew that. Not that she even knew what kulning was. "This is...a lot," she said at last.

"I fucking bet," Richie said, reaching out for the cigarette. Sara took another drag, for good measure, and passed it to him. "Are you gonna tell him?"

"I don't know," she replied with a sigh, rubbing her temples. "I mean...he's moved on, obviously...it's like the whole world has moved on and I just...wasn't there for it."

"What about your m-mom?" Bill asked.

Sara bit her lip and shook her head. "I don't know...I think it's a safe bet that they got a divorce. Mom wouldn't have left the city to save her life and dad's...not wearing his wedding ring."

"You need to tell him," Bev said, taking the cigarette back from Richie.

"Maybe," Sara said with a sigh. "I don't think I can do it today. It's not like he'd believe me anyway. He's probably too busy doting over his precious new daughter."

Richie smirked at this, "Is Nina a little jealous?"

The blond girl glared at him, "Shut the fuck up, Richie."

"You totally are jealous!" Richie exclaimed.

"Leave her alone, Richie," Bev chided him.

Richie raised his hands defensively and said, "Hey, I just didn't ever peg our girl for the jealous type."

"She has every r-r-right to be upset," Bill said.

"It's just a bit funny to see our Neens jealous because someone stole her da-"

Richie didn't get the rest of the sentence out. Sara gripped the back of Richie's neck and threw him into the pool. When he resurfaced Sara snarled, "Shut the hell up, Richie."

Bill and Bev both looked at each other questioningly before they both started laughing at Richie, who flipped them both off before paddling towards the shallow end so that he could climb out. After this, Nina glanced at her friends before covering a laugh of her own with her mouth. It was a lost effort though and before long she was laughing with the others. They were so caught up in the gale of giggles that they didn't even notice Max in the frame of the sliding door, staring at that with transfixed befuddlement. They only looked at her when she cleared her throat with overdramatized volume.

"Pizza's here," she said simply. After a brief pause, she asked, "Where's the Wheeler Wannabe?"

"If anything your buddy Mike is a wannabe of me," Richie proclaimed from the pool, just reaching a spot where he could touch bottom without his chin dipping under the water and his weight balanced on the tips of his toes.

Max looked confused at this and Bev explained, "He was being an idiot so he got pushed in the pool."

"Oh," Max said. "That's fair, I guess. You guys should come in, though." Her eyes met Sara's and she said, "We'd all like to talk to you."

Sara looked at her friends and shrugged. She quickly told them to remember that these people couldn't know about her being Sara, not yet, so to keep calling her Nina. They waited for Richie to wring out

his clothes to the best of his abilities before stepping back into Steve Harrington's kitchen.

19. Conference of Two

Sara chewed on her lip as she considered what they were saying.

They didn't trust her. That much was obvious. Not that she blamed them. She didn't know what they were thinking of feeling, though. She had a pretty damn good guess, but that was because she had a knack for reading people. Being on the outside looking in usually had that effect.

She'd hardly eaten her pizza and noticing this Steve placed a breadstick on her paper plate and pushed it closer to her. He didn't say anything, but the message was clear. She was skinny and he wanted her to eat. She picked up her slice of pepperoni and nibbled on it a bit, but it was half-hearted and she wasn't hungry. Especially not now.

When Will explained what he wanted her to do, to prove herself, her face dropped and she knew that it was noticeable by the way Will's mom looked at her. True, Sara was reluctant to do it, but not for the reasons that she was sure. She could wedge herself into a mind, but she couldn't read minds unless she did that. Thank god for small favors.

Someone started to say that she wasn't going to do it and she cut them off before they could. She was only vaguely aware of the fact that it was Max, who seemed smug about how Sara couldn't be trusted.

"I'll do it," she said, her face set and determined.

"Are you s-sure?" Bill asked.

"I said I'd do it," she retorted shortly. She put a forced smile on her face and said, "May I speak to you for a moment? Alone?"

Will blinked at her uncertainly. "Me?" he asked, though it was clear he was the only one she was looking at.

"I just want to make sure you know what you're getting into," she

said. It wasn't entirely a lie, but that wasn't her main motivation.

"Anything you have to say to Will you can say to us," Mike declared.

Richie retorted, "Wanting a one on one before the big event isn't asking for too much. Just let them have a fucking conversation."

"She wouldn't want a private conversation if she didn't have something to hide," Lucas insisted as he chewed his pizza.

"Everyone shut up!" Will ordered, getting onto his feet and beginning his walk around the table. "I'll go and talk to her."

"And what makes you so sure she won't just make you do what she says?" Dustin asked.

Will ignored him and said, "Come on, let's get this over with."

"Hold up, kid," the chief said. "How'll we know she hasn't gotten in your head?"

His doubt hurt her, but she didn't show it. Instead, she held up the rolled up sleeves on the white shirt she was wearing. "It's hard to hide a nosebleed on white."

"But how will we know?" Mike countered.

She shrugged and followed Will out the door. "Ask him something only I would know."

"What?" Max asked.

"It's not just me getting in his head," she explained. "He gets in mine too."

"Come on," Will said, pushing open the sliding glass door. He stood aside to let Sara go through. Before he left he looked back at his mom and the chief, who had identical looks of concern. "I'll be fine you two." Despite the confidence in his voice, he wasn't so sure.

He sat down on one of Steve's lawn chair and waited for Sara to sit in the other one, which she did after a moment. She didn't know how to

begin so she awkwardly sat there, sitting on her hands and rocking slightly. "So, how does this work?"

"Right," she said, shaking her head and coming out of her daze. "Sorry, um...well, it's kind of weird. So...um...it'll be kind of like you go from having one brain to having two. It's kind of...overwhelming. It'll be like that for me too, but I might start...doing some things you do."

Will raised an eyebrow at this. "Like what?"

Sara shrugged, "It just depends. Like, when I had to do it to my friends I stuttered for a week because of Bill, I became a smoker because of Bev...that one stuck."

"You smoke?" Will asked.

"It's not like we go through a pack a day," she said defensively.

"Is it only bad things?" Will asked. He suddenly was a bit warier about doing this. Did this mean he was going to adopt some of her traits?

She shook her head, "Nah. I could play the guitar and piano for a few days because of Richie. That was fun. I was pretty sure I had gotten AIDS off of a toilet seat once...that would be Eddie and his hypochondria. And I ate a LOT...probably because of Ben. I could go on, but I think you get my drift."

"I think I do too," Will said. "I don't get it, though...why couldn't you just tell me all of this inside?"

Sara bit her lip and said, "Well, I was just getting to that. I...hoped I could ask you for a favor."

Will's face became stony. "You want me to lie to my friends."

"Not exactly," Sara said quickly. "Just...omit a truth. Just for a while. Until I figure out what to do with it."

"Rule one in the party," Will stated. "Friends don't lie."

"It's not lying," she counted.

"Why not just control my head and make me do it?" Will grumbled. He was glaring at her now and making no attempt to hide it.

With a roll of her eyes, Sara answered, "I can get into your head, but I can't control it. With animals, maybe, but people are complicated. And even if I could I wouldn't."

"Friends don't lie," Will said firmly.

Sara put her face into her hands and started to rub her temples, taking long, deep breaths. She looked much older than her fourteen or fifteen years in that moment. "Look, you are going to know...everything about me. It'll fade with time, sure, but I just want one, tiny detail of my life to be kept secret. Just for now."

"Why are you so worried about them finding out?" Will demanded.

"You will see when we do this," she answered taking her face out of her hands. "And I hope you realize I could be threatening to blackmail you. I'll know as much about you as you will about me."

"I have nothing to hide."

"That's bullshit," she snapped. "You have something in there. I can tell from that little glimmer of fear in your eye. Unlike you, I promise to keep your secrets. And this is a secret I just learned about today. It's not that I'll lie about it forever...I don't think. I just need time to process it."

Will eyed her warily. She was right. He did have a secret. A terrible secret that he was certain couldn't be trumped by her own. Still...if she didn't tell he wouldn't have to...right?

"What's your secret?" he asked,

She stood up and straightened out her skirt and said, "You'll see...come on, let's get this over with."

He didn't seem too eager, though he was curious. With a nod, he got to his feet and followed her back into the house so that his mind

could be filled and consumed by the thoughts of another yet again.

20. Secrets

Will and Sara sat on the ground, legs crossed under them, and their backs against each other. Sara was facing the residents of Hawkins and Will was facing the kids from Derry. Will kept looking from Beverly to Richie to Bill and back again. It was still hard to see Richie and know for a certainty that it wasn't Mike, but it was slowly getting easier to do.

"You ready?" she asked him as he shifted his weight around behind her.

He nodded, "Yeah, let's just get this over with."

"Wasn't my idea," she said defensively before falling silent.

At first, nothing happened. She screwed up her face and dug her nails into her knees, her knuckles turning white.

Will was about to ask what was taking so long when he heard her. She kept repeating, *"God, I hate this. Son of a bitch, this hurts. Fucking humans."*

"Is the ranting necessary?" Will asked with an annoyed sigh. He realized he'd said something wrong when Bev cocked an eyebrow at him.

"I didn't say anything," Sara mumbled like someone who had been interrupted while they were in the middle of doing something important.

Will was about to turn around and ask one of his friends if she really hadn't said anything, but before he could he froze, eyes wide and mouth slightly open. His words were stolen from him as his mind overflowed with a lifetime of information from the girl sitting against his back as his own thoughts and memories did the same to her.

"Where am I?" a little girl screamed as she pulled and kicked at the restraints holding her down.

"It's alright, Nine," a blonde woman with a white coat said gently.

"Everything is going to be fine now." Despite her words and soothing tone, the girl was not fooled. Everything wasn't going to be fine.

"It's raining, man," Jonathan said as he pulled his coat in to zip it up. "Do you want to head back?"

Will looked at his older brother, who was probably thirteen or fourteen at the time. Then he looked at their project. It wasn't much now, but it would be amazing when he was done. "We're so close...we have to finish it, Jonathan."

His brother smiled at this, "I was hoping you'd say that."

"Nine, I'm going to give you another chance to cooperate," the blonde woman, Mama, said, leaning forward against the table they were sitting at. There was a guard in one corner of the room and a white cat upon the table, sniffing at a plate of food that was laced with poison. The cat knew this and wouldn't touch it.

"I will not make Snowball eat that," Nina said, defiantly and stubbornly. This was a few days before the gate had been opened, but it was a fresh memory. Snowball had been one of the girl's only friends in the lab who she could actually see and touch. When the guard had crossed the room to the table and broken the cat's neck she had screamed and sobbed, trying to reach for the cat. They wouldn't let her, though. She screamed and sobbed until long after they'd thrown her into the white room.

Will shivered against the cold of the dark, dank place that could have been Castle Byers, but it wasn't. Not quite. Everything was...wrong here. It was the upside down. He was sure he was going to die, but he tried to stay hopeful. Gently, so the monsters wouldn't hear him, he sang his favorite song, Should I Stay or Should I Go by The Clash.

An enormous turtle with green skin and kind eyes gave the girl a quizzical and friendly look before asking, "Are you certain you don't want to know who you are? Where you come from?"

"Hey Zombie Boy," a girl that Will had never met before said with a nervous smile. "You wanna dance?"

In truth, Will had no interest in dancing with this girl. He had come to the Snow Ball to spend time with his friends. The fact that he was a social reject made it a certainty that no one would approach him at the dance. Still, he had ended up dancing with her anyway. He'd hated it, but didn't share that fact with any of his friends. If he did then he'd have to tell his friends why.

"Well, that is one of the things to find out sometime. Isn't it splendid to think of all the things there are to find out about? It just makes me feel glad to be alive- it's such an interesting world."

The man who was holding her as he read to her made her feel safe. That was all Will could see him so far. That was, at least, until she turned away from the book he was reading to her to see his face. Will nearly shot out of his skin when he saw it was the chief, only...it wasn't. He was younger and clean shaven, but it was still him.

"Daddy, why aren't our roads red?" the little girl who would one day become Nine and then Nina.

Hopper chuckled and shook his head like this girl was always asking questions, which she was. She always was. "I don't know. Maybe there are still places with red roads?"

"Can we go there?" she asked. "When I get better, I mean."

His face dropped at this. She knew that she would get better. She didn't really feel sick. She knew it scared him, but he just had to see. She'd be okay. "Sure, kid. We'll find a place with red roads when you get better."

Will was sitting on the floor against the wall, watching and waiting as his girlfriend of a glorified three weeks sobbed in his bathroom. He didn't know how else to tell her that he just...wasn't into her. It wasn't anything personal. It was hard to pretend. He couldn't tell her though. He couldn't even tell his mom or his brother. Plus if he did...it would be the end of his already crappy reputation.

"I'm sorry, Jenna," he told her for the dozenth time.

Sara woke up from a nap, looking to see her mom or her dad, but they

weren't there. Instead, there were strangers. The same blonde woman who had killed Snowball. Mama. She sat upright and stared at the woman. She was usually a brave little girl, but she didn't like these strangers.

"Where's my daddy?" she asked. "My mommy? My parents?"

The blond woman gave her a smile that had no warmth. "What parents?"

A man held her down while another covered her mouth to muffle her screams before they began. Then the world went black. When she woke up again she was Nine.

"Holy shit!" Will exclaimed, gasping for breath once his head cleared enough for him to focus on the outside world.

"Yeah, that'll happen," Richie said

"Beep beep Richie," Sara said, her breath short.

Her nose was bleeding in a stream that wasn't heavy, but it was steadily not stopping. Her eyes were unfocused and she was shivering.

Hopper was the first one to notice this and he warily moved to kneel in front of her. He put a gentle hand on top of herself and leaned down to get a better look at him. "Are you okay, kid?"

For a moment she wanted to jump into his arms and cry, but she stopped herself. She pulled her hand away from his and shook her head. "I feel like shit, but that's why I didn't want to do this."

"Oh my god," Will said from behind her. "Oh my god!"

Still connected to his thoughts she knew what he was worried about. She rested her head against his shoulder and shut her eyes. "Yeah, I know...I won't tell."

"You won't?" Will asked doubtfully.

With a smirk, she said, "No. I won't. You should, though."

"I will..." he answered. "Eventually. What about you, though?"

"Are you going to tell?" she asked.

He looked at Sara's friends and considered for a moment before saying, "No." Then he smirked and said, "You should, though."

She managed a small smile and shook her head, "We'll see."

"Alright, are we doing this?" Richie asked, rubbing his hands together. "Tell us all the elements on the periodic table!"

Dustin scoffed, "Like she knows the periodic table."

"I'll have you know she and I made a song out of it so we could memorize it," Richie said smugly.

"Let's just get this over with," Sarah yawned. "I'm tired...and cold."

Alright so this night at Steve's is taking forever, but they'll be on their way to Derry in the next chapter. Cross my heart and hope to die.

21. Peppermint

Hopper glanced at the Maine kids in his rearview mirror. Richie was next to the left window, Nina was still sleeping against his shoulder, wrapped up in a thick quilt. Beverly was on her other side of her, tugging on the quilt. Mike had wanted to ride with them, but Hopper was quick to shut that down. One Mike was enough. True, Richie wasn't Mike, but he looked too like him. He was a good kid and all, but he was dating his daughter. Tradition dictated that he dislike the boy.

El noticed that her dad was looking back at their new companions...again and she turned in her seat to look back at them.

"Is she going to be alright?" she asked, nodding towards Nina. The girl had been sleeping for nearly twelve hours, with the exception of half an hour to use the bathroom and eat something.

"She'll be fine," Richie answered. "She just gets really tired after melding minds with people. When she did it with all of the losers-"

"Losers?" Hopper interrupted.

"Yeah," Richie said. "We call ourselves the losers club because...well...we're losers. Bill has a stutter, Neens is a NERD!" he shouted the word in her direction, but she only mumbled and tucked her face into her blanket. "Let's see...Bev somehow managed to get a bunch of assholes to spread a shitty rumor about her. Ben's fat, Mike - our Mike, not your Mike, he's homeschooled, Stan is a Jew, like one of those really orthodox ones who wears hannukahs and shit all the time."

"It's called a yarmulke, you racist fuck," Bev interrupted.

"Whatever," Richie said. "Anyway, we're losers and we know we're losers so we make tee shirts."

El raised an eyebrow at this. "You've made teeshirts?"

Richie stared at her awkwardly. It was hard for him to make jokes

with El and he wasn't sure he liked it. She too most everything seriously and literally. "...No...we didn't make actual tee shirts."

Hopper smirked and shook his head, amused to see that El had managed to trip Mike's doppelganger up.

Blue, who was in the far back of the truck, barked a few times, attracting everyone's attention.

"Stop the car."

Hopper perked up at the sound of Nina's voice and he raised an eyebrow at this. "Why? Is there something out there?"

"If you don't stop the car then there'll be something in here," she replied shortly. "That something will be my breakfast."

Hopper cursed but signaled that he was pulling over before he parked the car on the grassy side of the highway they were driving on. Richie made no effort to get out of her way so she pushed the door open and crawled over him, ignoring his protests when her knee drove into his groin.

The others had stopped behind them and Joyce and Steve were getting out and moving forward to see what was wrong.

"Is everything," Joyce began.

Before she could finish her question the blond girl put herself onto her hands and knees and started to expel the contents of her stomach. Steve gagged himself at the sight, but Joyce, having birthed and raised two boys, was used to things of the like. She rushed to the girl and gathered her loose, blond curls out of her face with one hand and rubbed her back with the other one.

"Are you okay kid?" Hopper asked cautiously, approaching when the wretching began to die down.

She nodded, "I'm fine...I just get car sick really bad. I hate cars."

"Oh," Hopper said. He hesitated for a moment before he went back to his car. He opened El's door and went into the glove compartment.

When he came back he had a bottle of water and a handful of peppermints. "Here. Rinse your mouth with the water and then eat the peppermints. It should help with your stomach."

She wrinkled her nose at the candies her father was offering to her. "Peppermint?"

The face she made was so much like his daughter's, Sara, not El, that he had to smile. It was the first time he'd smiled at her. It was hard to let himself like this girl. She looked too much like her. "Yes, peppermint. I don't know why it helps, but my ex-wife was into some hippie crap and that one actually worked. It was a lifesaver with my kid."

She raised an eyebrow at this. "El was in the lab."

"Not...El," he said simply. Not wanting to talk about it, he shoved the peppermints into her hands and started back for the car. "Get back in the car when you're ready."

She stared at him, mouth half open and eyes wide. Joyce rubbed her back gently and explained, "His daughter died a while back...he doesn't mean to be cold. I think you remind him of her...do you want me to stay with you?"

Sara stared down at the peppermints and ground her teeth together. He had them in his car...where he used to have them when she was a kid. Sure, he didn't see her...but he hadn't forgotten her. It was a start "I'm okay...thank you...do you know how far we are from Derry?"

"Your friend, Bill says we're about halfway. We should be there tonight." Joyce answered.

"Do you think we can get some lunch soon?" she asked.

Joyce nodded, "Of course. I'll talk to Hopper. I'll be right back."

Sara didn't think she'd stay out of the car for much longer. She had a lot of think about and if she did it where she was it could be hours until she went back into the car. She looked at the peppermints her dad had given her and unwrapped one before putting it into her mouth and starting to suck on it.

Hey guys, thanks for all the reviews! I've basically doubled my reviews in this story in the past two days. Someone asked what time this story takes place due to the timeline differences in the original works, but I never really thought about it. Maybe somewhere inbetween the timelines. Just vaguely in 'the eighties' i guess. Anyway, I hope this is enough to tide you over for a bit. This was like halfway written and I can't sleep so I figured I'd work on it. Updates shall be sloooooow until like January still. Sorry. REal life has to come first...frickin hate real life. Anyway, stay awesome guys.

22. Homecoming

"Are you sure this is the right place?" Hopper asked, staring at the house from the curb.

Sara raised an eyebrow at him. "Yes, this is the right place."

The house was more of a mansion than a house. It was pristine, white, three stories tall, with a large yard and Grecian pillars on the front door. Hopper and El stared at it in awe, but Richie injected, "Neen's house is the best base of operations we have. Just...you know, be careful in the bathrooms."

"What's wrong with the bathrooms?" El asked, still not looking away from the giant house.

"Nothing, exactly," Bev answered. "It lives in the sewers and bathrooms are connected to the sewers."

"You're telling me this thing can travel through the pipes?" Hopper asked dubiously.

"If you're lucky you'll never see it," Bev answered. "You probably won't. You're an adult and adults are oblivious as shit here."

"You should have just parked," Sara grumbled as another car pulled up beside them. Inside was one of her neighbors, one of the more gossipy ones. She rolled her window down and gave Hopper a friendly wave and smile.

Hopper started to roll his window down, but Sara was faster. She put a big, fake smile on her face and called out, "Hello Mrs. Williams!"

The woman turned to get a good look at the girl in the back seat, the man in the front forgotten...for a moment. She grinned back at her, "Oh, hello Nina! Who's your...friend?"

Hopper opened his mouth to answer, but his daughter was faster. "Oh, this is my Uncle Jim," she lied. However, the words came so seamlessly and effortlessly that no one would have known the better. "I went to see if he'd come here to help when mom...well, you know."

Mrs. Williams nodded, a small frown on her face. It wasn't exactly a secret that Sara's adoptive mother had gone a bit mad when her husband 'went missing'. "Yes, it's absolutely awful. I'm so glad you've got someone to watch after you." She gave Hopper a coltish smile and brushed a lock of auburn hair off her shoulder. "I hope to see more of you, Jim."

Beth Williams was about Jim's age, having a daughter around Sara's age. That daughter, in Sara's opinion, was a sloppy cunt who was faker than fake. A fakeness she inherited from her mother. They were both pretty, though, and Sara could tell that that was working on her dad, who chuckled at Beth's flirty comment. Turning so that Mrs. Williams couldn't see her Sara said, "She's married. Shut it down."

Startled at being told off by a teenager Hopper's smile vanished. He cleared his throat, and in a tone that he hoped couldn't be seen as him flirting he said, "It was nice to meet you, ma'am."

With another flirty smile and a playful wave, Beth Williams finally left.

"Your uncle?" Hopper asked, turning to get a better look at Sara.

She shrugged as she cranked the lever to roll the window back up. "I figure it's a better story than the truth. Plus, since Mrs. Williams knows the lie will spread."

"Like a wildfire," Richie added. "Can we park already? I should probably call my parents and let them know I've been staying at Bill's or some bullshit."

Hopper perked up at this and turned on Richie. "Your parents don't know that you left the state?"

"This is Derry," Richie deadpanned. "If they knew they probably wouldn't give a shit."

"Just park the damn car," Sara ordered. "We have shit to do."

Instead of parking the car Hopper turned on Sara again and gave her a calm, calculating look before asking, "How did you know my name's Jim?"

Rather than answering, she cursed and threw the door open, slamming it behind her and storming across the lawn and towards the garage. When Jim didn't move to follow her Bev opened her own door to follow. Richie, who was now in the middle seat, went to follow but was cut off by Blue leaping over the seat and out of the door to run after Sara, shaking out her fur and barking happily, obviously glad to get out of the car.

El looked at her dad and gave him a small smile, "I suppose we should go."

Jim looked over his shoulder to Joyce, who was parked behind him, giving him a confused look. He heaved a sigh and pulled his truck into the long driveway, reaching a large parking area out of view from the street that already had two cars parked there. Joyce and Steve were close behind and he waited for them until he and El got out of the truck.

Bill got out of the back seat of Joyce's car, followed by Mike, Will, and Nancy from the front seat. He fixed the other loser with a stern look and said, "Your friends are really something."

Bill raised an eyebrow at this and followed the police officer to the back of the truck, watching as he opened the tailgate to take out Silver and the other two bikes Richie and Bev had taken to Indiana with them. "W-what do you mean? Hey! C-c-careful!" He demanded as Hopper slammed Silver back onto the ground.

Before Hopper answered Bill and Will shared a look. They both knew that Sara was Hopper's daughter and that she didn't want to tell anyone just yet, but it was clear that they were both worried that Hopper had figured it out.

Hopper turned on the boy and said, "They're all...a bunch of brats. I think that Nina looked in my wallet or something. She knew my first name and wouldn't tell me why."

"It's probably because of me," Will said. "I mean, I knew your first name and we kind of melded brains."

Hopper looked at the kids, taking the second bike out of the trunk. "I

guess that's possible." It was obvious that he wasn't convinced though.

"They're just kids, Hop," Joyce said, wrapping an arm around Will's shoulder. "I think you might...need to go easy on them. It's obvious they're under a lot of stress. You being all...bad cop can't help."

With a sigh, Hopper took the last bike out of the truck and shut the back. "Yeah, I guess...come on, let's go have another meeting or...whatever."

Bill was gone and at the back door with the spare key. Bill opened the door, but Hopper was the first inside, his cop instincts kicking in. They went through a mud room that was at least twice the size of any other mudroom he'd ever seen. They crossed into a kitchen, that was Hopper could have sworn was as big as half of his house.

The kid at the sink was so surprised at the sight of strangers that he dropped the big bowl he was holding on the ground, the plastic clacking loudly on the tile, the popcorn inside jumping out of it like Old Faithful. On instinct, Hopper pulled his gun on the kid, whose hands shot into the air. He was...small for someone his age. Even Sara was an inch or two taller than him. He was thinner than the others and his brown eyes were huge with worry at the sight of Hopper pointing a gun.

"What the fuck is going on?" the kid screamed.

Sara, who appeared in the doorway in time to see the scene repeated, "What the fuck is going on?!"

Eddie looked at the girl in the doorway, his hands still in the air, his eyes frantic. "Nina! Get out! He's got a gun!"

"Put the fucking gun away," Sara ordered, planting her fists on her hips and glaring at Hopper.

Hopper had put the safety back on the gun, but his face was drawn in confusion. "Why didn't anyone say other people were going to be here?"

"I didn't know!" Sara screamed. "Stop pointing your gun at my friend!"

I swear to god I will kick the shit out of you, old man!"

"Just put the gun away!" Eddie pleaded, shutting his eyes.

"What the fuck is going-" Richie entered the kitchen behind Sara and froze when he saw Hopper. "Dude, what the fuck! If you shoot Eddie his mom will kill us all."

"I'm more afraid of her than I am of It," Sara added.

Richie nodded solemnly, "She is a terror."

"Fuck you, guys," Eddie spat at his friends.

Hopper, shaking his head, put his gun away at last. "Alright, alright, I'm not going to shoot anyone."

"Good call," Will said. "If what Nina thinks of his mom is true then I think it's best to avoid her."

"Who the hell are you?" Eddie demanded, glaring at Will, his hands still in the air.

With the threat of the gun gone, Sara crossed the distance between her and Eddie and pulled him into a big, tight hug. "It's okay, we'll explain everything, I promise."

Eddie heaved a sigh and lowered his hands, at last, hugging Sara back, trying to calm down his erratic breathing. He would have reached for his inhaler, but it was in the living room and he was not. Instead, he took a few deep breaths to steady himself. It worked just as well as his inhaler, but he still liked to keep his gazebos around. Just the inhaler, though. It had become something of a security blanket.

Richie went around to the other side of Eddie and hugged him too, reaching around so his arms were around Sara too. "Ah! An Eddie sandwich. Delicious."

Sara had to try to keep back a smile, but Eddie glared at Richie and shoved him away. "Get the fuck off me, Richie."

Sara chuckled and shook her head at Richie as he went to the pantry to get a broom to clean up Eddie's mess. "Come one Eds. We've got some phone calls to make...and some things to explain."

Did I laugh while writing this chapter at the idea of everyone screaming at Hopper and him just being confused as fuck?...yes...yes I did. Thanks for the love and reviews, guys! I'll try and keep them coming. I'm planning on having more of Dustin and Lucas now that we're in Derry and real shit is about to happen. We are now in the realm of It, The Mind Flayer, and maybe even Henry Bowers, everyone's favorite mullet wearing dad blower. Just kidding, I hate that guy. Anyway, have a good weekend you guys.

23. Merry Fucksmas

Getting the rest of the losers to Sara's house (or manse) was easier than any of them had expected. Stan and Ben were already in her living room, expecting to watch a movie on her big TV, which explained the popcorn. The only one missing was Mike. Hanlon, not Wheeler.

Joyce took Bev, Jonathan, Will, and Stan to go and get some dinner. Hopper cleaned up the mess that Eddie had made when he'd pulled his gun on the kid because he felt bad for scaring the kid so bad. Eddie wouldn't even look at Hopper. He had crossed paths with him when he was on his way to the bathroom and instead of stepping aside Eddie just stared at the man for about five seconds, turned around, and walked away as quickly as he could.

Sara excused herself to her bedroom to change out of her clothes and into clothes of her own, saying something about not wanting to wear a dress again until she was dead. Richie had Mike Hanlon's grandpa on the phone, trying to convince the older man into letting Mike come over to the Fischer house for a 'movie night'. Finally, he managed to get the stubborn old man to agree when Richie reminded him that it was the weekend and Nina could really use her friends with her father missing and her mother on the loose like a madwoman. That had done it.

With permission, Max, Lucas, Dustin, Mike, Nancy, El, and Steve started to explore the house. Richie, Eddie, and Ben followed, making sure that the other kids didn't get into Doctor and Mrs. Fischer's bedroom or anywhere else guests weren't allowed to go.

As they ventured, Eddie and Ben flooded Mike with questions. Were he and Richie related? Were they long lost twins? Was he SURE they weren't related?

Finally, when Ben and Eddie were satisfied with the answers Mike and Richie gave them Eddie said, "Alright, fine, whatever. If you start using voices like Richie does then I swear to god I'll fucking kill myself."

"Don't make promises you don't intend to keep, Eddie," Sara advised as she stepped out of her room to join them, hair brushed and clothes changed. Instead of the cobalt dress that she had stolen on her way to Hawkins she had changed into a pair of acid washed shorts, a baggy tee shirt with Pat Benatar on the front that hung off one of her shoulders, revealing a red tank top underneath, and a pair of converse. It was a startling contrast between the dress she'd been wearing.

"Well, it's nice to see you looking more like yourself," Ben teased when he saw her.

She playfully stuck her tongue out at him before asking, "Have you shown them the observation room yet?"

"Observation room?" Dustin asked.

"Doctor Fischer comes from a shit ton of old money," Eddie explained.

"Obviously," Richie added, gesturing to the big house around them.

Eddie flipped Richie off before continuing. However, before he could say much else Dustin cut him off. "You guys flip each other off a lot."

As if to make a point of it Eddie and Richie both put up their middle fingers at each other. Sara, in turn, covered her mouth to hide a giggle.

Dustin and Lucas glanced at each other before looking at Max. They were surprised to see that she was actually chuckling.

"She gets it," Richie grinned before pointing one of his middle fingers at Max.

This made Max's chuckle turn into a full-blown laugh. As she laughed she lifted her own middle fingers and flipped Richie and Eddie off as well.

Richie turned one of his offending fingers at Sara and, using his British accent, said: "Fuck you, my lady."

Smirking, Sara lifted up her own middle fingers to Ben and Richie, "Fuck you too, gentlemen."

Ben followed in suite, though he wasn't as amused as the others. "We wish you a merry fucksma," he said, his voice monotone.

"And a fucked up new year!" Sara sang, sidling up to Ben, years of voice lessons doing her justice.

"Show off," Eddie declared, directing one of his middle fingers towards her.

Dustin, Lucas, El, Mike, Steve, and Nancy all stared at the other kids, Max included, who were still flipping each other off and laughing hysterically.

They might have gone on laughing forever if they hadn't heard a loud roar. A roar that the Hawkin's residents knew all too well. Mike and El took each other's hands. Lucas and Max stared at each other, Max looking terrified, her hands still up, flipping the bird at two of the losers, forgotten. Lucas swallowed a lump in his throat and stiffened his jaw, not wanting to show how afraid he was. For Max. Steve and Dustin stared at each other, slack-jawed and horrified. Nancy swallowed a lump in her throat and was the only one who had the nerve to say it out loud. "Demogorgon."

The losers, on the other hand, had quite different reactions. Sara grinned and grabbed Ben by the shoulders, shaking him violently. "My boys are here!" She exclaimed.

Dustin looked at the girl, his face doing nothing to hide the fact that he thought she might be a complete idiot. "Your...boys?"

"Well two of them," Sara answered with a shrug. Athos is probably with Mike."

Lucas raised an eyebrow at this. "Athos?"

"Come on," she said, grabbing Eddie's hand and yanking him down the hallway with her. "You should meet them so they don't get the wrong idea about you."

The Hawkins' residents looked at each other as Richie followed Ben, Eddie, and Sara down the stairs to go and been Sara's 'boys. None of them were eager to look a demogorgon, or demodog, in the face again. Lucas heaved a sigh, at last, and announced, "If we end up getting killed by these 'boys' of hers, I'm going to be pissed."

He reached out for Max's hand and she took it, gratefully. They led the way, but it was obvious that none of them were as eager to see 'the boys' as Sara was. For the time being, at least, the observation room would have to wait.

This chapter is like...half written because it's all I had time for. Sorry. Demodogs will for sure be in the next chapter though.

24. Two Musketeers

"Put that fucking thing away, I swear to god!" Sara bellowed at her father when she walked into the kitchen and saw him against the wall, peering around it to look out the window and into her backyard. It wasn't really much of a yard. There was some cleared away grass, but it was mostly trees that led into the barrens.

Hopper glared down at her but did as he was told. "You better know what you're doing."

Slamming the refrigerator door both open and closed she straightened with an armful of packages of mutton, wrapped in brown paper. Sara didn't like to eat most meat, but her adoptive parents still bought quite a lot from Mike Hanlon's farm. With her adoptive father died and her mother away from home with a broken mind, the meat would soon spoil anyway. "It wouldn't kill you to at least try to communicate and trust me."

"What, are you the leader of this merry little band?" Hopper asked, his voice mocking.

Her knuckles went white as her fingers bit into the packages. She got blood on her fingers, but she didn't care. She wanted to tell him who she was, but how could she do that? He didn't trust her. He didn't like her. He missed her, or at least she thought he did, but he missed a little girl. She was almost all grown up now and the way he acted made her certain that even if he knew the truth...he wouldn't want to know the truth. Sometimes things that are dead are better kept that way. "When it comes to things like this...then yeah."

Hopper started to argue with her to not go outside, but he was too late. She was already out the back door, slamming it behind her with her foot.

El followed closely behind, giving him a reassuring look. If there was a demogorgon or a demodog out there then she would take care of it. She had done it once before. All the kids he knew hung back, but the kids local to Derry burst out of the back door after El and Sara, chattering excitedly.

Hopper was going to stay put, but he decided against it when he heard a scream he knew all too well. "Joyce!" he exclaimed before bursting out of the door, his hand on his pistol, ready to shoot.

Joyce was still in her car with the kids who had gone to get food. The one kid from Derry with her looked confused at her screaming, but not bothered by it. He'd only gone to make sure that he got something kosher, and Joyce didn't exactly understand what that meant. Aside from him, the other occupants in the car looked horrified.

Hopper drew his gun when he saw the scene in front of Joyce's car. Two demodogs, or hellbenders...whatever they were called, were circling around Sara, sniffing at her with their expressionless faces. Hopper was too startled to realize that Sara was actually petting them and giggling at their examinations.

He fired at one of the things, but while he wasn't looking El used her powers to turn the safety back on so the gun clicked uselessly. He pulled the trigger a few more times before he realized what El had done. He turned to glare at her, but she shook her head at him before gesturing at the animals and Sara. One of the creatures had turned its attention from Sara to Eddie and Richie, who were petting it like a dog. It was bigger than the dogs he was used to...and these ones had tails. They were long and serpentine, flipping back and forth. They seemed to try and keep their tails down so they wouldn't hit anyone with them, which was probably for the best, as there was a long spike at the end of them. They were all bigger than the demodogs they had dealt with in Indiana. Those had been about the size of a Saint Bernard. These ones were about as big as a large pony. If this was as big as the hellbenders or demodogs got...Hopper was glad they hadn't gotten this big at home.

"I think they're friends," El said.

As if to prove her point one of the creatures started to lip at Bev's cheek, making the girl squeal with laughter before she gave the animal a gentle shove away.

Sara ducked under the animals and sent the other creature to visit with his brother and her other friends. She tapped gently on Joyce's

window and when the woman rolled the window down she gave her a friendly smile. "Come on. I'll introduce you. They're really friendly, I promise."

Will was the first to get out of the car and he was followed by Stan who went to greet the creatures. Sara went back to the back door and came back with an armful of mutton. She gave one of them to Will, before Stan took the rest of them, knowing that introductions would be smoother with Sara to help them along.

"Aramis, Porthos," Sara called to them. "Come here please."

The hellbenders trotted over to her, understanding her as if she were one of them. They sat down in front of her, one of them wrapping his tail around him to gently beat the ground in front of his front paws. The others long tail wagged happily behind him so zealously that it slammed into the back of Richie's legs, knocking him off his feet, resulting in the uproarious laughter of the rest of the losers club.

Covering her mouth and fighting back a laugh she shook her head and addressed the hellbenders like she might address a group of young children. "This is my friend, Will. He and the others are like the losers now...you understand."

The creatures looked at each other (or they would have if they had eyes) and made a few noises, communicating to themselves. Sara nudged Will, knowing there were four pieces of meat in the package, more than enough to get Aramis and Porthos to make friends with him. He opened the package and offered a slab of meat to one of them, his hands shaking. Aramis, the one who had knocked Richie over with his tail, stood and started sniffing at the mutton.

"Um...I have a question," Dustin said, taking a wary step around to get a look at what Will and Sara were doing.

"Ask away," Sara told him, taking another package of lamb from Stan and tossing it to Dustin, who nearly dropped it, not expecting her to throw something at him. Porthos made a sound in the back of his throat as he looked at Dustin, who shied away from the demodog's gaze. "He's not going to hurt you," Sara scolded him harshly. "Give him the lamb chops and you two will be friends in no time. What's

your question?"

Dustin shakily took out the lamb chop from the package and held it out to the beast. "I was just...well...you said their names are Porthos and Aramis."

"That's not a question," Sara retorted. "But yes. That's Aramis," she pointed to the one with a white stripe down its back. "And that's Porthos," she pointed to the grey hellbender whose tail was almost black.

"They're...the three musketeers?" Dustin asked, relaxing a bit as Porthos took the treat Dustin was offering and nusseling him for another one.

"Yes," Sara answered. "Athos is with Mike. They should be here soon."

Dustin started to laugh so hard that he could hardly breathe. Porthos took a step back, bewildered, before moving forward again to sniff at the boy, plainly concerned.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," Dustin said, scratching the demodog under his chin. Still smiling he looked back at Sara and explained: "My demodog was named Dart...short for D'Artagnan."

It took Sara a moment to understand what was so funny, but when she did she started to laugh as well. If Dart was there then they'd have all of the Musketeers. "That's amazing," she said at last.

"It must be meant to be," Dustin said playfully raising an eyebrow at her and giving her one of his signature purrs before he could stop himself.

Everyone who had experience with the purr was annoyed by this. Joyce heaved a sigh, Will, Mike, and Lucas all groaned, Hopper rolled his eyes, Nancy, Max, and El exchanged looks, and Steve slapped his forehead. Everyone else looked confused by this.

Everyone, but Sara, who actually giggled.

Only two people noticed this. The first being Steve, who was surprised that Dustin had still not grown beyond the stupid goddamn

purr, but even more surprised that it somehow seemed to have worked on the girl. He didn't say anything, but he quietly reminded himself to give some advice to Dustin so that he at least had a shot and didn't mess it up.

The other person who had noticed was Richie. Unlike Steve, he wasn't pleased, but he kept his silence. For the time being.

Hey everyone...I'm sorry. I know some of you were hoping that Dart was one of Sara's boys, but I'm trying to stick to canon for the most part and sadly, Dart is still dead. Or at least he won't be making an appearance. Most likely. I don't know. I wouldn't expect it though. I'm sorry. I hope the rest of the Musketeers can make up for it though.

25. Mind Flayer's Message

As they ate, Dustin found himself asking Sara a bunch of questions about the demodogs, mostly because she was the only one who probably knew the answers. No one else really added in because no one else really cared. Richie was obviously sour about the two of them hitting it off so well. He ate his dinner quietly, glaring at his friend and the kid from Indiana. He had never asked her about the creatures, mostly because he didn't care too much. With how eager Sara seemed to talk to Dustin on the topic, though...Richie regretted that a bit. Plus, listening in on the conversation, it was actually quite interesting. Richie didn't realize that the hellbender's teeth retracted when they trusted someone enough. He didn't know that they were blind, though that wasn't much of a surprise, as they didn't have eyes. Sara said that they saw better than just about anything by using echolocation. Richie had no idea what that meant. Dustin, however, grinned and exclaimed, "Like a bat or a dolphin!"

"You're about as subtle as a brick, kid," a new voice said from behind Richie, taking his attention off of Dustin and Sara...for now.

It was Steve Harrington, who had moved to sit on an armchair behind Richie's place on the floor. Richie glared at the older boy and shoved his glasses up his nose indignantly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Dustin said something that made Sara laugh and Richie turned away from Steve to glare at the pair again. No one else really seemed to notice or care about what was happening with Sara and Dustin. Bev and Max were on another space on the floor, chattering away like they'd been best friends for years. Mike and Mike, who had arrived with the third demodog shortly after Joyce had, were discussing something seemingly serious with each other. El was getting drowned with questions from Eddie, Stan, and Ben, but she didn't seem to mind it too much. Joyce and Hopper were at the table, watching the scene with hawk's eyes while trying to act disinterested. Jonathan and Nancy were outside, probably sucking face. Bill and Will were silent observers as well, like Richie had been, but without the aggression.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Richie replied.

Steve rolled his eyes and took a bite out of his burger. "You're into Nina. It's obvious."

"It is?" There was a spark of fear in Richie's voice.

Steve smirked at the kid, "To anyone paying attention. I'm more concerned about what this is going to do to Dustin though because obviously, he's into her too."

Richie scowled, "Because he's interested in the hellbenders?" He didn't say so, but it was pretty obvious that he was implying that HE could have been just as interested in the hellbenders if he wanted to.

Steve shrugged, "You'd be amazed at how much it helps when you're into things that a girl is into."

"What would you know about it?" Richie challenged.

With a knowing smirk, Steve answered, "More than you'd expect."

"Um...Nina?"

The tone of Dustin's voice made everyone look away from their food and conversations to the girl. She was clutching her sandwich so hard that her knuckles were turning white. Her eyes were wide. Her breathing was sharp and short and her face had turned white. El placed her food aside and crawled over to the other girl, her head lowered and her eyes curious. She reached out and touched the other girl's arm, but yanked it way sharply, like touching the girl had burned her.

"She's cold," El said curiously.

"She's not just cold," Bill said, amazingly not stuttering. "Everyone, get away from her!"

"What?" Dustin asked, glancing back at the girl who he'd been flirting with just a moment before.

Mike Hanlon, who grabbed Dustin by the back of his shirt and

yanked him back, his strength surprising everyone.

"What's wrong with her?" Hopper asked as he moved in to get a better look at what was happening.

"I'll bet you anything it's the other," Eddie said, his voice anxious and fast.

"I thought she said that she couldn't be controlled by it?" Steve demanded, grabbing Dustin's shoulder and pulling him back a bit farther.

Stan shook his head, staring down at her, "She can't. That doesn't mean it doesn't talk to her."

"Taunt her is more like it," Bev corrected.

Hopper knelt down in front of her, despite the distance that the others were keen on putting between themselves and her. Her eyes were wide and blue...he realized then that he knew those eyes. But...it couldn't be...could it?

He knew it was a long shot, but he reached out and touched her cheek. "Sara?"

She gasped like she had been pulled out a body of water after nearly drowning. The sandwich she had been holding went to mush in her hands as she released it. "No," she said gently.

Hopper raised an eyebrow at this. "No?"

"She's gone," she said, as if that explained everything, her breathing still sharp and forced. "She's gone...it has her."

"It has who?" Richie asked, moving in to look at his friend now that the danger had seemingly passed.

She shook her head, "Not It it. The mind flayer...it has my mom." She realized what she said and stopped herself. "My adoptive mom."

"But we've known she h-h-had her for a while n-now," Bill said.

"Not like this," she insisted, glancing at her hands and grimacing when she realized how soiled they had become. "I have to go."

"What?" The word was a chorus sung by most of them.

"I'll go with you," El volunteered.

She shook her head at this. She had her issues with El, but she wasn't going to let that get in the way of what she needed to do and how El could help. "You need to stay here in case It comes. The Hellbenders can only do so much against him."

"Well you can't go alone," Dustin insisted.

"I'm taking Porthos," she explained. "I won't be alone."

"Well some of us, at least, should go with you," Joyce said. She thought that one of the older boys, at least, should go with her.

Sara shook her head, "No...I have to go alone. He said if I didn't it would be...bad."

"What, exactly, are you planning on doing?" Hopper demanded, still unable to shake the thought. She hadn't confirmed or denied that she was Sara...technically he hadn't even asked. It was a silly thought, really. This girl had made it clear that she didn't know who she had been before she was taken from her family. Plus, she couldn't have been his girl. Sara was dead. Thinking otherwise...it hurt too much.

He was surprised when the girl glared up at him. The way her brow furrowed and her jaw clenched didn't help him shake the feeling that she just might be his kid. She looked so much like his kid. "I have to do this. The Fischer's gave me everything. A normal life-

Richie cut her off and gestured at the mansion around them, "I think this is a bit more than normal."

She shook her head at this. "I couldn't save her husband...I might still be able to save her."

"At least have someone go with you," Hopper ordered, glaring down at her.

She raised her chin at him, "No. The Mind Flayer made it clear that I was supposed to go alone or he would kill her."

"It can kill the people it possesses?" Joyce asked, grabbing her son's shoulder, remembering when it had possessed Will.

"I don't want to risk it," she answered. She moved for the door, but Hopper moved to stop him. One of the demodogs outside screeched and Sara met her father's gaze. "Don't try and stop me...I'll be back. I can handle him."

She pulled the door open, but not before Dustin said, "Wait!" She paused and raised an eyebrow at him, but he crossed the distance between them and pulled a necklace over his head before offering it to her. At the end of it was a small, sharp shark tooth. She took it and eyed it skeptically before raising an eyebrow at him. "If you're going alone...I think you could use some luck."

She gave him a small smile and thanked him. She moved to leave, but before she could Ben intercepted her at the door and wrapped her in a big hug. Richie added himself in the hug, making a Sara Sandwich with Ben, but he didn't comment on it this time. He did, however, give Dustin a fleeting glare. She giggled and tried to force her way away from the boys, but before she could the rest of the losers gathered around to hug her.

The farewell made her reluctant to go, but she couldn't stay. Hopper watched from the kitchen window as she approached the hellbender with a black tail. She said something to it and petted it before, to Hopper's surprise, she climbed onto the thing's back and rode it into the barrens.

"Don't b-b-bother trying to find her," Bill advised, looking at the way Hopper toyed with his keys, anxious like he was ready to get in the car and drive after her. "She c-can take care of hers-s-self."

Hopper scowled at the boy before tossing his keys onto the counter and heaving an irritated sigh.

Before a silence could fall upon the group Ben looked up at the policeman and asked, "Who's Sara?"

Hopper's face softened with sadness and Bill, Richie, and Bev exchanged nervous looks. "It's not important," Hopper answered before storming back to his burger to brood in silence.

I just realized that someone asked me if I had a wattpad a bit ago and I didn't even answer. God, what a douche move on my part. Sorry guys. The answer would be no, I do not have a wattpad. I don't usually write a lot of fanfiction because I spend most of my time writing my novel. I just have a bug up my ass about this story, which is fine. I was getting burnt out on my novel so...for now this is my writing world, which is lucky for people who enjoy this story, I guess. I just have an account on this site. Anyway, sorry about that. Spoiler alert, Pennywise shall FINALLY make an appearance in the next chapter...I'm pretty sure. I love Pennywise. He scares the living shit out of me. Anyway, Merry Christmas Eve Eve! I'm off to see Starwars VIII...again. I know this is like a TOTAL fandom jump, but I'm kind of in love with Kylo Ren now like shit son. Star Wars is amazing. Anyway...leave me a review if you'd like. I'd like that.

26. Daddy's Home

They had all agreed to stay up in shifts and wait for Nina to come back. The adults and teenagers did, anyway. They sent the younger kids off to bed. The boys, all ten of them, had sprawled out on various places in the den, occupying the two sofas, one loveseat, and a LaZBoy. Those who didn't fit on furniture made themselves comfortable on the floor and did their best to go to sleep. Bev took the girls to sleep in Nina's room, assuring El and Max that she had spent the night here so often that it had been declared that she and Nina basically shared a room.

Steve, Nancy, Joyce, Hopper, and Jonathan had agreed to alternate their sleeping areas so that one of them could be awake in the living room in case the girl came back. They were all comfortable, but sleep was difficult. They were all silent, though. No one dared to speak. Nancy wished that Joyce would have let Jonathan sleep in her room with her. At least then she wouldn't be alone. Hopper tried to shake off his feeling of unease but to no avail. Even sleeping with his hand on his gun did him no good. Joyce felt like she slept in a haunted house and Jonathan was so consumed by discomfort that he hardly had the nerve to close his eyes.

No one was more scared than Steve, though, who was alone in the living room. Where once the house had been filled with laughter and a bunch of kids teasing, flirting, scowling, and just...being kids...it just didn't feel safe. He had his baseball bat sitting across his lap and he glanced from the kitchen door to the front door and back again, his foot bouncing to the beat of the clock as it counted the seconds with each deliberate and mind-numbing tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Steve cursed loudly when the clock upon the wall chimed out the hour. He'd taken up the bat, ready to swing it, but he relaxed when he realized that it was just the clock. Just the harmless ring of the clock on the wall. He heaved a sigh as he checked the time. It was nearly three in the morning. And it was quiet...too quiet. After the chime of the hour, even the ticking had stopped, consuming the house in silence.

That only made it all the easier for Steve to hear the kitchen door creak open, slowly and deliberately. He took up his bat, just to be safe, and stared at the entrance. He had expected to see Nina return, but it wasn't her. The door was empty, leading out into the black, starless night. His nerves on end, Steve stood up, his bat raised as he flexed his grip on one hand and then the other.

When he saw who entered the house he froze, staring slack-jawed at the intruder.

"Dad?"

Steve's father gave his son a calculating and stern look before glancing around the kitchen, taking in the surroundings. There was disgust on his dad's face, probably because he disliked the house purely because it was bigger and better than the Harrington home.

Steve's dad was easily annoyed by such things. After studying the kitchen, Mr. Harrington finally looked at his son, confusion on his face. "Stevie...what're you doing here, boy?"

Steve swallowed a lump in his throat and lowered the bat, looking at the floor so he wouldn't have to see his father's face. "I...my friends...they needed my help."

Mr. Harrington released a sigh, one that Steve knew all too well. Now he would be shaking his head, planting his hands upon his hips. Steve looked at his dad's shoes, unwilling to look him in the eye. Not just yet. For just a second his brow furrowed at his father's choice of footwear. He was wearing a pair of brown loafers, but there were...orange pom poms on them. That was...frankly, unusual.

"Stevie, my boy," Mr. Harrington started as he moved a few paces forward, his gait slow and calculating. "You ought to be at school, or back home even. This place...it has nothing to do with you."

Steve forced himself to look up at his father now. He'd never admit to it, but his dad scared the living shit out of him. He'd never beaten Steve or anything, but there was the constant reminder that Steve just wasn't quite what his dad was hoping for. His dad wanted him to be brainy, but he'd never been the top of his class. His dad wanted him to go to football. Steve hadn't made the team and ended up with a basketball scholarship instead. He would always be less than he father wanted. He'd never be good enough for his dad. And that terrified him. If he wasn't good enough for his own father...how could he be good enough for anyone else?

But there was something else. His dad's eyes were dark brown. For just a moment Steve could have sworn they were glowing yellow. All his mannerisms were right. The way he spoke, the way he dressed, the condescending nickname...it was all right...but his eyes...and his shoes. Something wasn't right here. He tightened his hold on his bat, trying to remember what the kids in Derry had said about It. He was so overwhelmed by the premise of the Mind Flayer again that he had completely forgotten about Derry's own breed of horror.

"How did you know I was here, dad?" Steve asked.

The look on Mr. Harrington's face darkened for a moment before it peeled away into a smile. A smile with no mirth and no light in it.

"It's not too late, Stevie...this place isn't for you...you'll die here." His father laughed like that thought was the most amusing he'd ever had.

Steve took up the bat, ready to swing it. "You're not my dad."

"Am I not?" Mr. Harrington asked, his tone surprised and even offended. He feinted forward like he was going to seize Steve, but he didn't even move his feet. Steve, however, stumbled back and nearly fell over his feet. The older man laughed at this, clapping his hands gleefully. Then, within the same breath, he sobered and took a small, slow step forward. "It's not too late, Stevie...go back home...you can't save them. I can make this all...go away."

Steve shook his head, glaring at the thing, whose eyes were now a blazing gold. "I'm not walking out on them."

The thing's face fell into a deep frown. "Well then...I might as well just kill you now...while you're ripe with fear."

Before Steve could question what the thing meant by 'ripe with fear', his father's face pulled back, revealing a row of sharp, needle-sharp teeth. He wasn't proud, but he bellowed in horror before the thing disguised as his father advanced on him, hands outstretched and fanged smile wide. He swung at the thing and the nails in the bat embedded themselves into It's skull so deep that Steve couldn't pull the bat free again. The creature continued to smile at him and took a step towards him, the bat still wedged in It's head.

"You should have gone home, Stevie," It jeered before reaching out, fingers centimeters from Steve's throat.

But it was not so lucky. An unseen force made It fly backward and slam against the kitchen wall, just above the sink. Pennywise struggled against whatever was holding him before he saw that he and Steve were no longer alone. Hopper was there, behind El with his pistol drawn on the thing. Nancy was on El's other side, pointing a shotgun at the clown. Joyce, Jonathan, and the rest of the kids were behind them as well, peeking out to get a good look at what had

come to them.

It's eyes fell upon El and he laughed gleefully. "Well well well, the almighty losers brought in some muscle!"

"What the hell is that?" Hopper demanded, still staring at It over the barrel of his gun.

It turned its head to a nearly unnatural angle to look at Hopper, still smiling. "And we've brought daddy along too. Too bad your kid won't last the night."

Hopper cocked his gun and took a step forward, his scowl deepening. "If you lay a finger on my kid I'll blow your damn head off."

Pennywise chuckled again and shook his head at the policeman. "I'm not the one you have to worry about with that one."

Hopper raised an eyebrow at this, but before he could question it, It began to expand, like a balloon, turning red as It swelled.

"Oh not again," Bev whispered to herself as she watched the monster change and contort. She hoped she was wrong, but-

It exploded, unleashing a spray of blood that doused everything in the kitchen, and then some. Joyce and Nancy screamed, but most of the others met the display with shocked silence. They were all too afraid, or stunned to do much else but look on as what was left of Pennywise, for the time being, slid into the sink and escaped down the drain.

Okay so...I'm hoping I did an alright job writing for Pennywise. He's tough for me to write and if I made him, like...stupid...please tell me. Also, I want to maybe write a sequel to this after this one is done and I need some help deciding on careers for the Hawkins kids. The It kids will probably be the same (except for Richie because no one really listens to radio anymore). So if you have a good idea for a job for El, Sara, Max, Dustin, Lucas, Mike, Nancy, Jonatahn, and Steve please let me know. I'm a whore for reviews so if you left me one...I wouldn't complain. Hope you all had a good christmas!

(editing here so I can delete my author's note)so i realized I didn't answer

a few questions, which was hecka rude so i want to clear that up.

1. My book doesn't have a title...titles are hard. I'll probably just call it Pen. That's the main character's name.

2. The new Star Wars is...AMAZING. I went in not expecting to ship Kylo and Rey, but...I do. so hard. I would climb that man like a tree. I know its a bit...wrong in the timeline, but my timeline is screwy anyway so i kind of want Richie and Dustin to have a heated debate about if Leia should be with Luke or Han (because ROTJ wouldn't be out yet).

I want to utilize some of some characters who haven't gotten as much love in the next chapter. maybe Nancy, Stan, Ben, and Lucas. I dunno. any thoughts are appreciated. thanks for sticking with me guys. you're awesome.

27. Nine

No one was sleeping anyway so before they even made an attempt at going back to sleep, they all began to clean the blood in the kitchen. It was harder than cleaning Bev's bathroom had been, but they managed to get it done quicker with more hands at work. Steve didn't say much, but he didn't need to. It was plain to see that he was shaken after the encounter with Pennywise. Joyce had to go out for a cigarette before she could help with the cleaning, but no one made any complaints.

Lucas, Dustin, Max, Mike (Wheeler), and Will were all rambling on about how messed up what had just happened was, very much stating the obvious. Richie kept shooting glares at Dustin whenever he spoke, though he hid it well, scrubbing off the kitchen counter. Rationally, he knew that Dustin wasn't all bad. Hell, if he hadn't shown an interest in Sara he might even like the guy, but Richie was slowly coming to terms with the fact that he might actually have a crush on Sara. Had someone told him when he'd met her nearly a year ago he would one day find her to be...well...he never would have believed it. It had all happened here, too...just a room away.

Richie liked the piano well enough, but the only reason he was still taking lessons was so that his parents would let him learn guitar. It was the only thing that kept him coming back to Liz Fischer for lessons. Liz had once been a singer and dancer on Broadway, but she'd had to give up that life so that she could stay with her husband when he got a research position at a university in Maine, of all places. Liz and Elton Fischer were both good people who really had no right ending up together, yet they had done just that. She was an artist and he was a scientist, but together they made this...awesome person.

Richie actually really liked Liz. She wasn't like most adults in Derry. She and her husband actually gave a damn. It was nice...feeling like an adult gave a damn about you. Hell, Richie hadn't ever really felt that way before. Not even with his own parents. They were good people. They had their issues, though, just like everyone else. Liz had once confided in him that she couldn't have children and it broke her heart. Richie's heart broke

for her a little bit too. She would have been a great mom.

As Richie worked at a piece he heard the kitchen door open and Dr. Fischer entered, calling out to his wife, concern, and worry in his voice. Richie considered, for a moment, still his work on the keys, but quieter so he could hear what had the doctor so worried. He didn't have to silence himself, though. He heard Liz greet her husband merrily, trotting towards the kitchen, but once she reached the kitchen she screamed.

Richie stopped playing, startled by the scream. "Mrs. Fischer?" Richie called, standing from the piano.

"Stay in the living room, Richard!" Liz called out from the kitchen, not able to keep the quaver out of her voice.

Like hell Richie was going to do that. Being careful to keep his footsteps quiet he moved past the living room and next to the archway that divided the kitchen from the rest of the house. Needless to say, he was not expecting to see Liz and Elton having a discussion, which was heated and spoken in whispers. The discussion wasn't what surprised him. They were married and adults. The two, hand in hand, meant for many discussions. What did surprise him was the girl in the middle of the room. She was barefoot and filthy. Her hair might have been blonde, but it was too covered in dirt and oil to tell for sure. She was wearing a pair of dirty jeans that were at least three sizes too big. Her shirt was tattered and ripped in several places and she was skinny. Sure, she was short and nothing could be done about that, but she looked like she hadn't had a proper meal in weeks.

The adults were oblivious to the fact that the girl seemed to sense him and turned to face him. Though everything else about her appearance was a bit repugnant her eyes were clear, big, and blue. Richie swallowed a lump in his throat when she looked at him and for a few seconds, he forgot that she wasn't the only one who might see him.

"Richard!" Richie started and tried to pull out of the doorway, but Elton Fisher's voice, more stern and harsh than Richie had ever heard it, made the boy freeze before slowly stepping into the kitchen, his head down like a dog that had just been kicked. The girl took a step back, giving him room to face the adults. Somehow her gaze was more intimidating than Elton and Liz's.

"You were told to stay in the living room, boy," Elton growled. It was a frightening contrast. Usually, Mr. Fischer was friendly and fun, but not now. "You're involved now, do you understand?"

"Elton, you're scaring him," Liz chided her husband, putting a comforting hand on Richie's shoulder.

"I'm scared!" Elton exclaimed, making the girl jump, taking a step back. "He'd be a fool to not be afraid."

Liz glared at her husband and puffed her chest up. "Well, that may be so, but that is no call for you to be rude. We should just call child protective services. They'll know what to do with her."

"Government?" the girl asked. It was the first word she'd said and it even surprised Elton, who had brought her into the house in the first place.

Warily, Liz answered, "Yes, the government."

The girl's eyes narrowed at this. "No. I won't go back."

"Go...back?" Liz asked.

She glanced between Liz, Richie, and Elton before nodding. "I won't go back there...you'll have to kill me first."

"Chill with the dramatics, kid," Richie chuckled.

The girl looked at him, her mouth drawn in a line. The girl he would come to know with a sharp tongue and the wit to match. She was guarded and calculating. "You don't know me," she told him.

"Obviously," Richie scoffed.

"What's your name, dear?" Liz asks, her tone soft and gentle.

The girl looked at Liz Fischer and shook her head. "I haven't got one...not...a real one, anyway."

Elton raised an eyebrow at this. "Everyone has a name."

"Not me," she insisted. "They always just called me Nine."

"Nine?" Richie asked.

The girl pulled back her sleeve, revealing her tattoo. "Nine."

Elton, Liz, and Richie all moved in to inspect her arm. Richie went as far as to lick his thumb and rub at the numbers with his spit, trying to get them to smear. When he caught the girl's eye again she had a grimace on her face and she was staring at him. "That's...disgusting," she declared before taking her arm away from him.

"Where did you come from?" Elton asked. "Why would the government want you?"

"I could tell you, but you wouldn't believe me," she sighed. Then she realized..."I could show you...but it wouldn't be pleasant."

"Then show me," Elton volunteered.

"Let's have some dinner first, though," Liz insisted. "I'll order us some pizza."

"Pizza?" the girl asked.

"YOU've never had pizza?" Richie exclaimed. She shook her head and he and Liz shared incredulous looks at this.

"I'm not sure I feel comfortable calling you Nine," Liz said warily.

"We can give her a new name!" Richie exclaimed. "It'll be like...adopting a dog and naming it...only it'll be a person."

"My dog's name is Blue," the girl said, seeming interested now that the conversation had moved onto something more thrilling, like dogs.

Elton raised his hands to halt the conversation, "Wait a minute...you have a dog?"

The girl nodded.

"This dog has a name?" he continued.

"Yes, her name is Blue," the girl repeated.

"Yet...you don't have a real name?" Elton asked. "You thought it was more important to give your dog a name than it was to give yourself one?"

"Well I talk to my dog, sir," she answered. "I rarely ever speak to myself."

Unable to help himself, Richie laughed at this. Elton was too flabbergasted to find humor in the situation, but the girl smiled slightly. When he was done laughing Richie suggested, "What about Nina?"

"Nina?" Elton and the girl repeated.

"Yeah," Richie explained. "Replace the E in Nine with an A and you've got Nina."

"Nina," the girl repeated thoughtfully. It didn't feel quite right, but it was better than Nine so she nodded.

"Well then, Nina," Liz said, putting a hand on the girl's shoulder and giving her a smile. "How about you take a shower, get dressed, we'll have some dinner, and talk more then?"

Nina smiled a bit and nodded, letting Liz Fischer guide her away to clean months of dirt from being on the run away.

*me: *plans on writing something with the lesser used characters in the story thusfar**

*a reader*suggests backstory about Nina coming into the loser's club**

*me: *writes a fucking flashback instead**

I'm sorry...I really will write more about the more underappreciated characters. Most likely in the next chapter. My brain is dumb. However, fans of Nichie, I'm pretty sure has become their ship name, I'm sure you'll like this chapter. Plus I wanted to write a bit about Sara's adoptive parents since Elton is dead (it's not a spoiler if you've read the other chapters!) and Liz is possessed by the mind flayer...anyway...leave me a review and a happy new year!

28. Morning At Noon

It was nearly noon when El finally woke up the next day. She wasn't the first awake, but she also wasn't the last. They'd spent most of the night cleaning up the blood in the kitchen so they hadn't gone back to sleep until it was nearly dawn. Not that anyone was complaining. No one wanted to sleep before the blood in the kitchen was gone. There was still a coppery scent in the air underneath the odor of dish soap and Pine Sol, but it was nothing compared to how overwhelming it had been before.

She was hesitant to go into the kitchen, in case the blood on the walls had appeared anew, but the kitchen was as clean as I had been before she left it to shower and try to sleep. She wasn't the only person in the kitchen. She smiled weakly when she spotted Mike next to the sink filling up a glass of water.

"Good Morning, Mike," She told him, holding back a yawn as she moved to get her own drink.

When Mike turned around he gave her a confused look, squinting at her like his vision was cloudy. Then, with a monster of a yawn, he took the glasses he was holding in his other hand and put them on. "Richie," he explained before taking a drink of water. When he finished he wiped his mouth and explained, "I think your boyfriend's still asleep."

El's cheeks flushed at this. It was still early, or at least it was early in terms of when she had gone to sleep, so she hadn't been thinking that Mike might have been Richie. "I'm sorry," she said hastily.

Richie shrugged and put down his water before leaning against the countertop, shoving his hands in his pockets and glaring at the ground. "It's fine."

El might not have known Richie for long, but she knew him well enough to see that something was wrong. The playful and annoying glint he had in his eye was gone. He seemed upset, though El didn't know if he was upset in a sad sense or an angry sense. Or both. "Are you alright?" she dared to ask him at last.

With a sigh, Richie shook his head, "No, not really...Nina's still not back yet."

El's eyes widened. "She's still gone?"

Richie raised an eyebrow at her, "That's what I just said."

El took her chin in her hand between her thumb and forefingers and considered his words. She was pretty sure that Nina didn't like her all that much, but she didn't know why. Still, she was like El was. She wasn't her sister like Kali had been, but she was something to El. Plus, she understood Richie's concern. She'd been gone for too long and she hadn't told anyone where she was going, or why she was going. It was...stupid, to say the least.

"I could find her," El offered.

"If you're talking about going back into the void," Richie began, "don't even think about it. You remember what happened last time you went there? We need you to close the gates. You can't do that if you get stuck in the void."

El frowned at this. She hadn't been expecting Richie to be opposed to her looking for Nina, but he made a good point. She hadn't been expecting him to be rational. He was too much of a clown for her to take him seriously, yet here he was...being serious. "I guess you're right...should we wait for the others to wake up? If I'm supposed to close the gate then I'd like to get started. There's no need to waste any more time."

"I know some of the guys wanted to go with you, in case you needed help," Richie said. "You'll want to take Blue with you. And it might be a good idea to tell the cop so he doesn't have an aneurysm when he finds out he probably won't be going too."

"Can't we just drive there?" El wanted to know. She knew that it wasn't an option before, but now they had adults with them so they could get in the car and go. Plus, then he dad could go with her and avoid having an aneurysm, whatever that was.

Richie scoffed at this, "Drive through the barrens? Good luck. You

can't even ride a bike down there, let alone drive a car."

"The barrens?" El asked.

Richie opened the frosted glass window and gestured to Nina's backyard, which was just a small strip of lawn before it fell away to the barrens. "The barrens," Richie announced, gesturing to the space and standing aside to let El see it.

Her eyes widened a bit before she looked back at him. "We're going in there?"

Richie frowned a bit and shook his head, "I would usually come, but-"

"You want to stay behind in case Nina comes back," she finished for him, smiling a little.

He rolled his eyes at this, "Yeah, don't rub it in. Go talk to the cop. I'll get Blue and the boys."

El frowned and watched him leave before shaking her head and leaving to find her dad. That wasn't hard to do, though. He was on the sofa, half asleep, glaring at the TV, even though it wasn't on. She sat next to him and gave him an imploring look. Before she could ask, he shook his head at her. "I'm fine, kid. Just...thinking."

El wasn't going to let him off that easy, though. "What're you thinking about?"

Hopper scoffed at this and shook his head, "Just this town...it's a weird place. I was thinking about going around town. Try to find Nina's adoptive mom. Get a better feel for what's going on around here. Buy some groceries."

El swallowed a lump in her throat before telling him what she had talked to Richie about. She half expected him to be angry at her, but he surprised her by being alright with it. He nodded and said, "That's fine, just make sure you take at least one of the older kids with you. Maybe two of them. Nancy and one of the boys, maybe. Your boyfriend's evil twin probably has the right idea. We should leave some people here just in case Nina comes back. Did Mike and the others bring their walkies?" El nodded and he said, "Good. Bring one

of them with you. Leave another one here...I can take a third, just to be safe."

"And the forth?" El asked.

Hopper shrugged, "I don't know. I'm sure you guys will figure it out." He stood up and ruffled her hair a bit before asking, "Any grocery requests?"

She smiled playfully and said, "Eggos."

He rolled his eyes but smirked anyway. "I don't know why I even asked. Tell Joyce where I went where " He gave her a kiss on the forehead before he grabbed his keys and left.

El decided to take some time to appreciate the silence, but there wasn't a lot of time for that. The rest of the kids came into the living room from where they had spent the night. Mike (Wheeler) gave her a hug. He probably wouldn't have had the nerve to do that if her dad was there. She was surprised by the group that had wanted to go with her. The other Mike had had to go back home earlier that morning. Something about his family owning a farm. He had promised to come back when he could, but his grandpa could be a bit...rough. Max and Lucas had agreed to go, along with Dustin and Will. Jonathan and Nancy were coming too. As far as the Derry kids, or the Loser's Club as they called themselves, Ben was coming, and Eddie. Stan was too, though he didn't seem thrilled by this. Bill and Bev informed her that they would have been more than happy to go, but they needed to see the adults in their lives before they got too wise. Dustin made a joke about how since they had nine companions they were like the fellowship of the ring. El didn't understand the joke, but Mike, Lucas, Will, and Ben were all amused by it.

Overall, El didn't think they were a bad group. She was a bit hesitant about the losers who had joined them. Stan seemed anxious and nervous. Eddie was...well, he was tiny. And Ben...El didn't like to be judgmental, but she didn't think he would be able to keep up if they ever had to run. She felt rude for even thinking it, but she had to remind herself to give him a chance.

"Well let's go then," Dustin urged them on.

Richie, still cold towards Dustin after his conversation with Sara, glared at the boy and shook his head. "You might want to eat first."

"Oh," Dustin said sheepishly. He couldn't figure out why Richie was so cross with him. He had been friendly enough before. However, that was a question for another time. He sort of wished that Steve was coming with them. Steve would know what was going on. Steve, however, had volunteered to stay behind with Richie and Mrs. Byers in case Nina came back. "Yeah...that might be a good idea."

Richie rolled his eyes and shook his head, "Yeah, you'll want to bring Blue too. The hellbenders can't get too close to the rifts, but Blue can sniff them out."

"You mean you don't know where these gates are?" Lucas asked, his voice defensive and heated. He, too, was aware of how rude Richie was being to Dustin and it put him on the defensive for his friend.

"Derry's sort of messed up," Ben explained, giving Richie a confused look. Richie was no stranger to giving people shit, but now he was just being mean. It was odd. It made everyone concerned for him.

"Messed up?" El asked.

"The rifts move," Eddie stated, exasperated. "Can we get this over with? I think everyone with half a brain wants to get this over with so we can get here before sundown."

Happy New Year! I'm so excited! The next chapter is going to have so much awesome crap in it! My little Fellowship, of course, the Loser's clubhouse, and my FAVORITE beastie from the It novel. I'll have to change it a bit, but I was super bummed because it didn't make it into the movie. That's the only hint I'm giving you as to who the monster is. Feel free to guess, though! You won't know who it is if you haven't read the book. For real, I know it's like...a million pages long, but it is SO worth the read. It's like...in my top 3 novels. Anyway, happy new year! The review whore in me is asking for reviews so I can know what you guys like, what I'm messing up, and where I can improve so this story can suck as little as possible. Anyway, happy new year again! Thank god 2017 is over. Burn that shit down with napalm!

29. The Fellowship

It was clear to see that Blue was still bothered by the fact that Nina wasn't back, but she still trotted ahead of their fellowship, nose close to the ground, trying to sniff out the gate.

Nancy followed behind the dog, with El behind her. Jonathan was at the back of the group. She wished he wasn't. If he was up with her then she would have told him that Blue made her a bit nervous. She liked the dog well enough. She was really more of a cat person, honestly, but that didn't mean anything. The dog was smart...smarter than any dog had any right to be. Still, she was used to El, and El could break a man's neck with her mind.

Her hand never left her belt. That was where her gun was. Technically it was the chief's gun, but he'd given it to her. At least until they were out of Derry and things were back to normal again. Or at least as normal as things ever got in their lives. 'Normal' was a bit of a myth since Will had gone missing. Her eyes were too opened to see beyond the veil of normalcy now. She missed things being normal, of course, but she didn't miss being blind.

As they walked, Nancy tried to listen to the sounds of the barrens. She couldn't understand why the people of Derry had decided to name this place 'The Barrens'. They were anything but barren. There were trees and rocks and so much water! She could hear the streams from all over, but it was a bit of a miracle that she could hear anything in this place over the kids in their group, or their fellowship as Dustin had taken to calling them.

"Oh my god!" Eddie exclaimed, not for the first time. "I think I just walked through poison oak, you guys! My mom's gonna lose her shit if I come back home covered in poison oak!"

"For the love of god, Eddie!" Stan exclaimed, turning around to yell at his friend over his shoulder. "How many times do we have to go over this? Not every plant is poison oak!"

"No, some of them are poison ivy," Eddie countered.

"Would you guys calm down?" Will asked. "I haven't seen any poison ivy or poison oak. I think you're okay."

Blue barked and it managed to get everyone to shut up and try to get a better look at the dog. Nancy looked at Dustin, who shrugged. He didn't know what the dog was trying to say any better than she did.

When no one offered any information about the dog's behavior Ben asked, "Do you smell something, girl?"

The dog barked again before putting her nose against the ground one more time, making sure she had the scent before trotting onward. Nancy took her gun out now, taking the dog's behavior as a queue to be more on her guard. It was another five minutes at least before the dog stopped. Nancy, expecting to see the rip in a tree or something nearly stepped in the rift. She would have too if the dog hadn't barked at her then snapped at her ankles. It wasn't very big, but if the kids were right then this was one of at least three rips between their world and the upside down. Sure, it was a lot smaller than the one she had seen in Hawkins, but it was big enough that if she had stepped in it she would have fallen straight through.

The others drew up to the opening as well, making a ring around it so they could get a good look, but keeping at least a foot away from the edge. Like Nancy, they didn't want to get too close either and risk falling in.

"This feels...too easy," Jonathan said, staring down at the rift.

"You say that like it's a bad thing," Stan replied. "Besides, we're about a mile into the Barrens. I'm sure Blue just took us to the closest one. I wouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth if I was you."

Dustin had scooped up a rock and was taking a slow, small, and deliberate step towards the rift. He held the stone above the gate and then dropped it in. It fell onto the pinkish, gooey surface with a nasty sounding splat before it slowly sank through from their world into the upside down.

"You're sure you can close this thing?" Stan asked, looking at El, who was studying the entrance quietly.

Mike, who was standing on the other side of her, glared at Stan and countered, "Yeah, she can close it. She's done it before."

"Calm down, Wheeler," Max jeered from across the entrance. "You won't make any new friends if you act like you're on your period all the time."

"Step back," El told them, ready to close the gate now that she'd examined it.

Blue was the first one to step away, but the others followed suit when the dog yipped at them and bit Jonathan's pant leg, nearly knocking him over as she pulled him away from the rift.

Closing this gate was easy compared to the one back in Hawkins. It was still hard though. The ground trembled a bit, which made the fellowship react in various ways that were a bit distracting. No one had been expecting Lucas's reaction, though. He unleashed a scream that would have suggested that he had yet to begin going through puberty and yanked Max into a tight hug. All of his friends would tell you that Lucas was brave, and he truly was, but when he was startled...sometimes you wouldn't guess that was the case. The losers didn't laugh at Lucas, probably because they didn't think they knew him well enough to make fun of him. Max, however, started to laugh hysterically. El scowled at the two of them. She wouldn't have minded the screaming or the laughing any other time, but this time...she needed to focus and they weren't making it easy.

By the time she had finished, El's nose was bleeding from both her nostrils and her face had gone pale. She wavered on her feet, but she didn't fall. Mike caught her by the shoulders just to be safe though.

Eddie stepped forward and experimentally stepped down on where the gate had been. Stan tried to resist the urge, but he couldn't stop himself from poking Eddie in the back and yelling 'BOO!'. This resulted in another gale of giggles from members of both groups.

"Are you okay to walk?" Jonathan asked El, worry in his face upon taking in her appearance.

She nodded, "I'll be fine. I just need to rest a bit. I can make it back to

the house though."

"Let's get going then," Nancy suggested.

They were all in the process of getting back on the trail when a loud screech filled the air. It was unlike anything any of them had ever heard and it was enough to make them all freeze. Nancy swallowed a lump in her throat and reached for her gun again, pulling the weapon out of her belt just as another screech filled the air.

"Guys," Dustin asked, "What the hell was that?"

"If I know Derry, and I know it pretty well," Ben answered, "I don't think it can be anything good."

"Well we'll have to run for the house then," Eddie insisted, his voice rushed and on the edge of panic, though that seemed to be how his voice always was.

"I don't think El can run all that way, you guys," Mike said. "Using her powers wears her out. I mean, look at her!"

El raised an eyebrow at Mike with this declaration and he quickly added, "I mean, she looked beautiful as always, but can't you tell she's-"

His words were cut off by another screech...and then the light was blotted out of the sky. They looked up, up, up...and then they saw it. It blocked out the sun like a storm cloud, wings spread and claws extended, ready to snatch them from its place in the sky.

Though they were all horrorstruck by the sight of the giant black bird, none were more afraid than Will was. When he was about five he and Jonathan had watched The Birds together, without their mom knowing, of course. That in itself had been terrifying enough, but the next day they had gone to the zoo and Will had seen a vulture. For a kid who was so small, the bird had looked so big. It hadn't hurt it, only glared at him with those big, orange eyes. Despite this, Will had had nightmares about giant birds attacking him and his family for months. They were the type of nightmare you could never forget.

This was worse, though. Much worse. The bird blocked out the sun,

making itself a moon in a solar eclipse, and it hung in the air, never beating its wings, never shifting in the sky. Unmoving, the bird didn't fly or glide. It was...floating. Floating was the right word for it.

Blue barked hysterically and it was enough to pull Will out of his daze. Everyone had started to run and he would have been left behind if Blue hadn't taken his sleeve in her mouth and dragged him after the others.

"Where are we supposed to go?" Nancy screamed as they dashed into the cover of the trees. Mike had El's arm around his neck and was half carrying her as they ran. There was no way they could get back to the house fast enough to outrun the bird. Not without leaving her behind and that was something they simply wouldn't do.

"The clubhouse is close!" Ben shouted back, taking the lead. "Come on! It's this way!"

The bird shrieked from above again and it began to circle. Will looked up at it again, just to be sure that it was real and really there. Not just a figment of his imagination. After his final look, he kept his eyes away from the skies and dashed after his friends, hoping they had one hell of a clubhouse to keep that bird out.

Twas no werewolf, but the monster bird! Man, I loved that bird. I was planning on this chapter being longer, but this seemed like a good place to stop it. For now. I'm having trouble thinking of what some other good fears and monsters would be so if you have any ideas or suggestions...I'd love to hear them. That's it for now. Damn I updated with this chapter quick! Well done me. Anyway, leavemeareviewmaybeidunno. Love you guys, bye!

30. Liz Fischer

As much as Hopper wanted to think that Derry was just as vanilla as any other American small town the more time he spent in the town center...the less convinced he was. On the surface, everything seemed normal and vanilla, but he was a cop. Plus he'd dealt with all the bullshit in Hawkins. Hopper knew how to look deeper. The adults all greeted him politely enough when they learned that he was Liz Fischer's 'brother'. They all had a lot to tell him about his 'sister'. They didn't know Liz that well so being able to spin the lie was easier than he would have expected.

"It's so good of you to come here for Nina," the pharmacist said when Hopper went to the counter with first aid items and other odds and ends, so it wouldn't be suspicious. "I don't know anyone else who would have adopted a girl who's been through as much as her."

"What do you mean by that?" Hopper asked. When the man raised an eyebrow at his Hopper explained, "My sister and I have been a bit out of touch. I don't know all that much about my niece."

"Well that just makes it better of you to have come all this way for her then," the man said. He leaned in and lowered his voice, all too eager to share his gossip. "I don't know all the details, but I do know that Elton found her on the side of the road on his way home from the university one day. It turns out she was running away from this cult in New Hampshire, of all places. No one knows where the crazies got to, but the New Hampshire authorities have said they've been onto the sickos for a while."

"REally?" Hopper asked, feigning awe. He was impressed with the story. He almost wished he and El had been able to come up with something as simple, yet it would have been harder for them living in Hawkins. Her running away from a cult...well it wasn't that far off. And in a weirdo cult, they likely wouldn't give their kids birth certificates or social security numbers. It made everything complicated...yet simple.

The pharmacist nodded, "Word is that Liz can't have kids so I wouldn't be surprised if they were thinking about adopting anyway."

She's...a really good girl."

Something about the way the man called her 'a really good girl' put Jim on edge. One thing was for sure...he didn't want Nina, Max, Bev, or El having anything to do with this man. Still, he managed to keep the disgust off his face and paid the man, giving him a polite smile before bidding him farewell.

Jim was in the process of putting his shopping into the front seat of his truck when he noticed a 'missing' poster on a nearby telephone pole. He raised an eyebrow before moving to examine it. He tried to remember the exact number of missing kids Beverly and Bill had said they had had in just one summer, but it slipped his mind. All he knew was that it was ridiculously high. He moved to the poster and found that it wasn't the only one. Under the poster for Elsa McMyers was another for Jason Parker...and there were more under Jason.

Tina Yong

Melanie Fitzgerald

Stephen Duffer

Elizabeth Hamilton

Freddie Greyson

Daphne Weiss

Shiloh Kingsbury

Erica Shepard

Jake Chambers

Henry Dean

Daniel Torrence

Carrie White

Susanna Walker

Jim only paused when he came upon a familiar face.

Jane Ives

He tore the poster away.

Michael Wheeler

Lucas Sinclair

Dustin Henderson

Maxine Mayfield

William Byers

Jonathan Byers

Steve Harrington

Nancy Wheeler

William Denbrough

Michael Hanlon

Edward Kaspbrak

Richard Toizer

Nina Fischer

Beverly Marsh

Benjamin Hanscom

Stanley Uris

He was nearly to the bottom of it now. There was only one more page and that one made him freeze, staring at it, unable to keep the horror off his face.

Sara Hopper.

He stretched out a shaky hand and touched his daughter's face. She must have been about four or five when the picture had been taken, her curly hair in pigtails and a big smile on her face.

He didn't know how long he had been there before he felt someone tugging at his sleeve. He tore his gaze away and looked down to a kid that was barely tall enough to stand at his hip. He was maybe seven with pale skin, covered in freckles all underneath an unruly mop of red hair. "Mama told me to say your sister is there," the kid told him, pointing to a woman across the street.

The woman was tall, thin, and had long auburn hair that fell onto her shoulders elegantly. She smiled coyly at him and nodded for him to follow her. Hopper looked down at the kid, but he was already gone. The woman gestured for him to follow again and, reluctantly, Hopper crossed the road after her. She led him into an abandoned shop, dusty and dark from neglect. She swept the dust off of a wooden chair and sat down, crossing her legs.

Hopper would have to be blind to deny that this woman was beautiful. She was sophisticated and elegant, but she had an air about her that was all too familiar. He sat across from her, his face set and his mouth in a firm, straight line. "Liz Fischer?"

She smirked at this and crossed her legs, which attracted Hopper's attention. He glanced at her legs before forcing himself to look back at her face. "I've heard that you're my brother, officer. That's not true though, is it? No, I remember you from before with the boy. Fancy you turning up here...so far away from home."

Jim scowled at this. "Yeah, well I just want to make sure you stay the hell out of my world."

She laughed at this, shaking her head when she saw that his hand was resting on his gun. "Now now, that's hardly necessary. I just want to talk to you. See, I've made an arrangement with a ...mutual friend of ours."

His scowl deepened. "Nina."

The mind flayer laughed through Liz Fischer again. "You humans

really are dull, aren't you? Still, ...you're more amusing than the beasts in the blind world."

"What was the arrangement?" Hopper demanded, hoping he could find a way to counter it.

Liz made a sweeping motion with her hands and leaned back against her chair. "This was the arrangement."

"I...don't understand," Hopper said.

Liz leaned forward, her low cut dress giving him a good view down her shirt. One that he tried, in vain, to ignore. "That little parasite has been more trouble than I care to admit. However, she is fond of this woman." She ran her hands from her ribs down to her hips before continuing. "I was about done with her anyway. I've learned all I could from her so giving her up won't be too much of a sacrifice."

"And what did she offer in return?" Hopper asked, his voice terse and cold.

Liz smiled a bit and shook her head, "Are you worried because of your dislike of me or because you care for her?"

"What difference does it make?"

"None, I suppose," Liz said with a sigh. "I do see why she didn't want to do this, though. You're quite...well, anyway, let's get one with it, shall we? If I'm to give up this vessel I'll have some work to do. I have enjoyed our little chat, but it's time to draw it to a close."

"Not before you tell me if the kid's alright," Hopper snarled.

With a roll of her eyes, Liz said, "Calm down. She left my realm just before I found you."

"She was in the upside down?" Hopper bellowed, standing so suddenly that he knocked over the chair he had been sitting in.

Liz smiled up at him, unfazed by the display. "So much passion. If I didn't know better I'd say you already knew that she was your daughter."

This stilled Hopper's rage and he stared down at her dubiously. "You're lying," he insisted.

She reached into her purse and pulled out her wallet. She flipped to a photo of Liz Fischer, her husband, and their adoptive daughter. She offered it to him and said, "Look closer, officer. Memories don't lie. Only your eyes do." As Hopper took the picture and reached for his own wallet to find his own picture of Sara, worn from him looking at it so much and from a different time entirely, she smiled and said, "She needed to endure what she feared the most...and it would turn out that that was you."

Hopper glared at her before looking towards the pictures, which were now side by side. Before he could look at them Liz jolted like she'd been electrocuted and a plume of black smoke shot out of her mouth before flying out the back window, breaking it in the process. Liz went limp and fell off the chair and onto the ground with a loud thud. Casting the photos aside, Jim knelt down beside her, touching her neck to check her pulse. It was weak, but still there.

As suddenly as the mind flayer had abandoned her she gasped and fell into a fit of coughs, turning on her side to try and catch her breath. She saw Hopper and shied away, trying to scramble away from him. "Who are you?...Where am I?" she asked, still breathing heavily.

Jim put up his hands slowly and assured her, "It's alright, I'm Jim Hopper. You're Elizabeth Fischer, right?"

She nodded and pulled her legs up to her chest. "That thing...that thing that was in my head-"

"It's gone now," Hopper assured her. "Nina brought me here to help."

"You know Nina?" she asked hopefully.

Hopper glanced at the discarded pictures before picking them up. He sat next to her and studied the photos. It was impossible to miss now that the mind flayer had pointed it out. Nina had Sara's eyes. Her teeth had gotten smaller and straighter, most likely after her baby teeth had fallen out. Her nose was the same. Her hair was a little

darker than the white blonde it had once been, but he couldn't deny it anymore. "I think I know her better than you'd think."

Liz leaned in to get a better look at the pictures. It took a second, but then she, too, saw it. "Where...where did you get this?" she asked, gently taking away the picture of Sara when she was still a girl.

"That's my daughter, Sara," he answered. She gave him an incredulous look and, with a sigh, he added, "She died of leukemia about nine years ago...at least that's what I'd thought."

Liz stared at him slackjawed, but Jim didn't seem to notice. He stood up, dusted his trousers off, and turned to offer her a hand to help her up. "Come on, let's get you home. I'm sure you've got a lot of questions."

She was hesitant, but she took his hand and let him help her up. As he began to lead her out of the abandoned shop he added as an afterthought, "By the way, everyone thinks I'm your brother."

Liz gave him a befuddled look while he opened the door for her. "I'm an only child, though."

Jim chuckled a bit at this. "Yeah, me too. Come on, let's go."

Two chapters in one day?! What kind of fuckery is this? Anyway...there's the big reveal. And I left the fellowship on a bit of a cliffhanger, I know. But Hopper knows! And Liz is now in the game. I love Liz. She's good people. Anyway, I'd ask for a review, but...yeah, I'll ask for one anyway. Talk to you guys later!

31. The Clubhouse

"Where the hell is this fucking clubhouse?" Jonathan bellowed as they all ran into the clearing.

Nancy had never heard Jonathan curse like that before. Perhaps the Derry kids were rubbing off on him. Still, she shared his concern. The bird's cries were getting louder and closer. She'd heard it swiping its claws at the tops of the trees more than once. El was slowing them down. She was tired and couldn't run that well. No one blamed her for this, of course, but it would have been nice if they could have gone faster.

"There's no house here!" Lucas bellowed, frantically looking around where Ben had led them.

"We're all gonna die!" Will shouted, staring wide-eyed and horrified at the sky, looking for the bird. They could still hear it screeching at them, but they couldn't see it.

"Where's this stupid clubhouse?" Mike repeated Jonathan's question, holding tightly onto El, who was being held up between him and Dustin.

"Would you guys stop yelling!" Stan yelled, springing into the clearing at the end of the group.

"We would if we had a clubhouse to hide in," Max snapped, holding Lucas's hand so tightly her knuckles were turning bone white.

"We could get into the clubhouse if you guys would maybe not stand on it!" Eddie shrieked.

The Hawkins kids were confused, but Eddie shoved Max and Lucas aside with a strength that surprised even him. He'd love to see his mom call him fragile after that. However, with the couple off the door he and Ben were able to yank the hatch open.

"Come on!" Ben shouted when no one except for Stan and Eddie jumped into the clubhouse. That was all the encouragement they

needed, however. Lucas pulled Max forward and all but shoved her inside. She almost fell over, but it was easy to forgive. After that, he started pulling the others into the clubhouse. After Max, Lucas helped El and Mike in, then Will, then Dustin, Nancy, and Jonathan. Lucas also forced Ben in before jumping into the clubhouse, yanking the door shut behind him.

It was more of a bunker than a clubhouse, really. The door was an actual door, save for the missing knob. It was covered in netting that had grass, leaves, and dirt upon it that made the entrance invisible from above. Before the summer was over they never would have been tightly squeezed into the clubhouse, but, thanks to Ben's building abilities and the hard work of all of the losers. Even Blue had helped dig out the big underground room they were in. Jonathan had to crouch, but everyone else fit inside comfortably. Lucas was about to ask how they were supposed to get out when he realized there was ladder carved into the wall of the clubhouse. It was really more of a bunker than anything else. Thanks to steel and tin panels keeping the earth out the space was large, dry, and surprisingly comfortable.

Ben forced his way between Nancy and Lucas to get to the door. There was a chain hanging against the wall that he looped through a hook in the wall before securing it with a steel rod.

Everyone was still panting from their run, but they were alive.

Mike helped El into a seat, which was really just a milk crate covered in a few old blankets. Still, she sagged against the wall and shut her eyes, grateful to finally have a rest bit. No one else was as tired as her so they all were busy making sure everyone was okay and then taking in their surroundings.

"This is your clubhouse?" Nancy asked, her breathing finally slowing down after she made sure that her brother was okay. She was still hugging Mike, despite his displeasure.

"We originally wanted to build it above ground, but Ben's kind of a genius and we did this instead," Stan said, dropping onto his own seat after lighting one of the lanterns that hung from the ceiling just before Jonathan nearly ran into it.

There were no real chairs, just things that could be used as chairs or benches. There were some posters, though. There was a Beetlejuice poster from Bill, pictures, and charts of old Derry from when Ben came into the clubhouse to do his research. There was a poster of Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia, courtesy of Richie. Bev had a few lighters and a pack of cigarettes stashed away. Sara had a small stack of science fiction novels on a box in the corner with a star guide on the top. Eddie had an extra inhaler somewhere. Stan had a few bird watching booklets strewn about. Mike (Hanlon) had contributed some old fleece skins from his farm to line the walls where it was more drafty to keep the cold out and most of the blankets, knowing they wouldn't be missed. Every loser had left their mark in the bunker in one way or another.

Ben flushed at being called a genius, both embarrassed and pleased at the praise. "It wasn't genius," Ben muttered shyly.

"This is awesome!" Will exclaimed as he studied the clubhouse. "I mean, it makes Castle Byers look like a pile of sticks!"

Jonathan smirked at his brother and shook his head before saying, "Dude...Castle Byers kind of is a pile of sticks."

"Castle Byers?" Eddie asked, sinking into a spot next to Stan.

"We built it a while ago," Jonathan explained. In all honesty, he hadn't used Castle Byers or thought of it much in years, save for to go and find his brother there. He might have kept going there if it was as good of a hideout as this one was, though. "It's just a little shack."

Will scowled at his brother at this. "It might just be a shack, but it's OUR shack. Don't insult Castle Byers, Jonathan."

Jonathan chuckled and shook his head at this, but agreed to not insult the shack anymore.

Nancy and Jonathan were the last to sit down. She took the last crate and he sat on the ground next to it so he could stretch his legs out a bit.

"So what do we do now?" Nancy asked, looking at their merry group

of misfits.

No one had an immediate answer, but Mike finally said, "We can just wait here until El's feeling up to making a run for the house."

"But what if that thing finds us?" Jonathan injected.

"It can't fit through the door," Dustin proclaimed, pointing at the overhead entrance.

There was a rapid knocking on the door above and the brief, cautious calm that had fallen over them. No one calmed down until they realized that one of the voices shouting was coming from outside of the bunker.

"Would you guys shut up! It's just me!"

"Mike?" Stan bellowed back.

"It's a trap!" Eddie screamed.

"Calm down, Admiral Ackbar," Dustin snapped. "How could it be a trap?"

Jonathan and Nancy exchanged a look before nodding at each other. Jonathan quietly unlatched the door while Nancy held her gun at the ready. He threw the door open revealing that Nancy was pointing her gun at whatever was on the other side of the door.

No one was more surprised by this than Mike, who was standing outside of the door. He had been on his way back to Nina's house when he heard the ruckus from the clubhouse and had decided to investigate. He put his hands in the air and took a few running steps backward.

"That's Mike!" Stan yelled. "Don't shoot him!"

Nancy wasn't so easily convinced. She kept her gun drawn, but she wasn't going to shoot him. Not yet.

Another shriek filled the air, making them all jump. The bird was above them. Mike stared up at it, his eyes wide in horror and his

mouth agape. Nancy lowered her gun and started shouting at the others, telling him to get in the clubhouse. That was all the convincing that Mike needed and he jumped into the hatch. Jonathan yanked the door shut and he and Mike H. helped him chain it shut. They had shut it just in time for something large and fast to slam into it then rattle the door, trying and failing to rip it off its hinges.

The screaming resumed after this.

"Shut up!" Max screamed over the mayhem. Somehow that was enough to get everyone to settle down and realize that the door had stopped shaking and there was more than one beast shrieking outside. They listened and waited with bated breath as the creatures fought, their voices rising and falling depending on how near and far they were to the clubhouse.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, there was silence.

omg such suspense. such wow. so...i know some of you have been worried about when Nina/Sara will be coming back. It's not in this chapter, maybe not the next one, but it's soon. BUT I'M REALLY EXCITED ABOUT THE BEASTIE FIGHTING THE BIRD! LIKE WHAT IS IT? I know, but you don't. mwahahaha. I hope you guys have a good weekend. pssst, leave me a review. i still need careers for the hawkins kids k bye

32. Fellbeast

Nancy and Jonathan were the first to peek out of the clubhouse. It had been nearly five minutes of silence. A silence that one of them trusted.

Nancy was about to crawl out when something big and gray landed on the ground in front of her. It was so large that it made dust jolt through the cracks in the walls of the clubhouse. Nancy screamed and shot at whatever was outside, grazing the thing's leg and making it scream out in agony. That done, she threw herself back into the clubhouse, falling hard, hurting her knee in the process. Before Jonathan could help her he resecured the door. Mike (W.) clung to El, who weakly wrapped her arm around him, resting her head against his shoulder.

Lucas and Max were hugging each other so tightly that neither of them could breathe. However, neither of them were complaining. Eddie had found his inhaler and took a puff before trying to still his breathing on his own. He wasn't having any luck, however. Stan's lips were going white as he forced them shut, refusing to scream, despite the creature still screeching and bellowing just outside. Mike Hanlon worked his throat, cursing himself for not bringing a weapon. He should have known better.

Dustin was muttering the words 'oh my god' over and over, rubbing his head through his baseball cap. If there was the room he would have been looked like he might cry, but he forced himself to be brave. If he was going to die he didn't want to die weeping. Jonathan was holding Nancy, glaring up at the door above them. He didn't know what to do. None of them did. It seemed that Nancy shooting the thing had only made it angry. They were all expecting the thing to burst through the door and kill them all.

The door didn't explode open, though.

When the beast silenced no one knew what they were hearing at first. It sounded like...singing.

It was very pretty singing in a language none of them knew.

However, Nancy and her brother knew the melody, mainly because of their nana, who was an opera enthusiast.

"Is that...Rigoletto?" Nancy asked, giving her brother a confused look.

Mike, who was just as confused by this, nodded. "It's usually sung by a dude though."

"Open the door!" Ben exclaimed, stepping over Nancy, careful to not step on her.

"Are you insane?" Jonathan asked, shoving the chubby boy away when he started to undo the chain keeping the door shut.

"No!" Everyone was so surprised to hear Eddie speak up that they fell silent and faced the small boy. "Ben's right, it's okay!"

"If you're wrong and we die," Lucas began to threaten the smaller boy.

This didn't settle well with Stan, Mike (H.), and Ben. They were all just lucky that Richie had decided to stay behind. All the losers present knew that if Richie had been around to hear someone threaten Richie, even if they hadn't gotten the whole threat out, he would have knocked them into the ground. By staying back at the Fischer mansion it was possible that Richie had helped avoid a bloody brawl between him and Lucas.

Eddie, however, didn't seem phased by it. "We're not gonna die! Open the damn door!"

Jonathan looked at Nancy and waited for her to give him a nod before opening the door and letting Ben climb out of the clubhouse. They heard him try to greet whatever was outside singing Rigoletto, but he stopped speaking almost as soon as he began. He tried again, but he was stopped before he could get two words out again.

Eddie, being skinny and quick, moved around everyone else and wedged himself between the ladder and Jonathan before scrambling up it.

"Hey!" he shouted once he was on the ground.

There was another screech and Eddie went silent. Despite this, the singing continued. It wasn't until Eddie poked his head back into the clubhouse and said, "It's okay, just...be quiet."

Stan and Mike Hanlon were quick to follow, but the others weren't as close behind. Dustin was the first of the Hawkins kids to rise above the clubhouse to see what the commotion was all about.

The creature that Nancy had slipped a bullet into wasn't the bird they had all seen in the sky, but something new. It was massive, two-legged, and, instead of arms like the Demogorgon, it had bat-like wings with thin skin stretching across the bones in the things wings. Still, it was definitely from the upside down. There was no doubt about that. It had the same flower-like face, which was being held in the lap of-

"Nina!" Dustin exclaimed, a toothy grin spreading across his lips.

Eddie, Mike (H.), Stan, and Ben all sushed Dustin, but the glare that Nina shot him was enough to shut him up. Despite the interruption and the angry growl from the angry monster, she didn't stop singing. Even if he had wanted to he wouldn't have been able to stop his mouth from dropping open. Her voice was beautiful. It was like a dream. A dream he would have liked to not wake from. Despite how her voice lulled him into silence and seemed to be doing the same for the giant winged beast, he wasn't unaware of her appearance. Her nose was bleeding, and her face was stained with at least one other nosebleed. There was even dried blood seeping from her ears. There was a gash on her side that he could see clearly, as the wound was exposed by the gaping hole in her shirt, which was ruined, covered in blood. She had definitely looked better.

"Holy shit," Lucas breathed once he surfaced, staring at the scene in shock and maybe horror.

Everyone else reemerging had the same reaction. El, still tired, was only able to get out with the help of Mike and Jonathan and Blue had to get pushed out, not able to climb up without help. Despite how excited the dog was to see her owner she kept her distance, not wanting to get too close to the new monster in her lap.

When she stopped singing, the beast made a content, clicking noise before nuzzling into her lap, pulling its wounded leg up into itself. "It's okay," she panted, rubbing the neck of the animal. "He's just cranky because someone shot him."

Nancy flushed at this but said nothing.

"You got another upside down creature?" Dustin asked, carefully stepping forward.

"Yeah, and it wasn't easy," she retorted, wiping the blood from her nose with the back of her hand. It didn't do any good, though. It just smeared the blood across her cheek. She was so bloody that she didn't even seem to mind. "Anyway, this is Fellbeast."

"Like in Lord of the Rings!" Dustin exclaimed, only quieting down when he heard the animal growl.

"What exactly is that thing?" Lucas asked, perfectly happy with the view he already had of it.

"He's a full-grown version of one of the walkers," Nina answered. "They're kind of like the hellbenders, but they look kind of like people. They don't have a name for themselves, or if they did they forgot it since the mind flayer took over their world."

"Demogorgon," Mike (W.) said, giving his friends and sister a fearful look.

"I...guess," Nina answered slowly. "They're a bit more unpredictable than the hellbenders are. They don't have the pack mentality. They're more like...falcons or..."

"Sharks," Nancy said, staring at the creature in awe. Was Nina implying that if she, Jonathan, and Steve hadn't killed the Demogorgon back in Hawkins then it would have grown into one of these things? She had been grateful for having killed the thing before, but now...

"Yeah, sort of like a shark," Nina answered. She rubbed the creature's shoulder and it picked its head up, making a gargling sort of clicking

sound while cocking its head like it was looking at her. "Are you well enough to go?"

Fellbeast twisted his body until he could get onto his feet. When he stood on the foot Nancy had shot he shrieked in pain, but adjusted its stance and shot into the sky.

"What happened to the bird?" Jonathan asked, watching Fellbeast wing his way into the sky.

Nina tried to stand, but she was unsteady on her feet. She might have fallen over if Dustin and Mike (H.) hadn't caught her and held her up. She gestured down at her shirt, which was ripped and bloody. She was in worse shape than it originally looked like. There were at least three other rips and wounds that hadn't been visible while she was trying to get Fellbeast to calm down. "It wasn't expecting something else big in the sky. Last I saw it it was slinking back into one of its holes...can we go home? I could use a shower."

"And maybe some bandaids," Dustin suggested, looking at her bloodied mess.

She scoffed at this. "Please, I'm not a little bitch. I don't need any bandaids. I need a cigarette and a bath."

"Home," El said.

"Home," Nina repeated.

I thought it would be fun to have a demogorgon, but super sized. I thought to myself...how could I make a demogorgon scarier? So I made it bigger and gave him WINGS! My upside down monsters aren't exactly canon, but I still love them. Don't forget to leave me a review! I'm still a review whore.

33. Waiting

Joyce tried to appear unfazed as she and Richie waited for someone else, ANYONE else, to join them at the Fischer house. She felt uncomfortable in a stranger's house without anyone else there. It didn't help that the only person there with her was almost a mirror image of her son's best friend and yet was absolutely nothing like him. For the first hour there Richie sat on the sofa, clicking away through the channels on the Fischer's impressive 30' inch television. However, nothing captured his attention so he just kept flipping through channels.

He did settle on a channel once, but it didn't last more than thirty seconds. Joyce had been passing from the bathroom to the kitchen when it happened. There wasn't a lot there in terms of food, but with the help of one of Mrs. Fischer's cookbooks, Joyce had managed to find a recipe for soup that was simple enough that she probably wouldn't mess it up and that she had all the ingredients for.

It looked like a children's program, with kids and a kind looking woman singing songs. Upon first glance, it was totally ordinary. Then...Joyce actually listened to the words. The woman, though congenial and sweet in appearance and tone, was giving the viewers awful and...disturbing advice. Richie wasn't oblivious to this and he glared at the screen before he finally pushed the button that turned the television off.

"Well...that was..." Joyce began, unsure of what to say.

"Severely fucked up?" Richie finished for her, hopping out of his seat and stretching his lanky limbs. "Yeah, good old local TV."

"That was a local channel?" Joyce asked, still staring at the blank screen.

Richie nodded. "I'm pretty sure that fucking clown has his hand in it. He has his hand in everything around here."

Joyce looked at the boy before looking back at the TV, trying to come to grips with how messed up this town was. "Do you want to help me

make dinner?" she asked at last. "I'll mince the onions if you cut the potatoes."

Richie agreed, mostly because it would be something to do and he needed to take his mind off of his friends out in the world, trying to close the gates to the underworld. Or hell. Or the upside down. Or whatever the fuck it was called. He sort of wished that he hadn't been the only one to stay behind with an adult he didn't even know. Still, someone needed to do it and if Sara was going to get home first, which she should have since she had been gone the longest, then he wanted to be the first to see her. And when he did see her he was going to rip her a new one and declare that she was the biggest idiot he had ever met in his entire life. First Bill and his determination to fight it the year before, plus everyone else in the Loser's club, himself included. Now Sara. It was like if he wanted to care about someone, either as a friend or in any other way, they were doomed to be fearless idiots and Sara was either the most fearless of them all or the biggest idiot.

Or maybe he just cared about her the most.

Not that he'd ever admit to that. Not now anyway. Maybe not ever.

When the door opened Richie was on his feet, dropping his work and rushing to see who it was.

It wasn't that he wasn't happy to see Bill and Bev again, they just weren't who he was hoping for. With Bill and Bev there to help their workload got cut in half so they turned on a movie. Richie got to the movies before anyone else could. He chose *The Breakfast Club*...that was Sara's favorite movie.

Jesus, what was wrong with him? Maybe Steve was right. He would have asked him, but Steve was currently passed out in the basement. Not that Richie could blame the guy. He hadn't gotten any sleep until almost everyone else had already gone. Your first encounter with Pennywise tended to do that. Still, he put a note in the back of his head to try and talk to the guy about it when he woke up. He seemed to know what he was talking about. Richie could use all the help he could get.

Still, for now he had to distract himself.

"Hey, Bev, that's you," he said when Molly Ringwald came on the screen. Bev just rolled her eyes...the first time he said this. By the time they were halfway through the movie he had pointed at the actress and informed Bev that 'that's you' at least two dozen times.

Bev was about to tell Richie to shut the hell up when the door opened again. This time Bev, Bill, and Richie all dashed into the kitchen to meet their friends...only to be disappointed again.

"Mrs. Fischer?" Bev asked, taking a wary step back.

"It's okay, kid," Hopper said entering the kitchen behind her, shutting the door behind them. "The mind thing is out of her."

Liz raised an eyebrow at the three kids in her kitchen. "What on earth are you three doing here?"

"It's kind of a long story," Hopper sighed.

"Jim?"

Joyce was standing in the doorway looking confused between Liz and Jim, arms folded over her chest.

Liz smiled upon seeing the other woman. She smoothed out her green dress before approaching Joyce, hand outstretched. "Hello, you must be Officer Hopper's wife."

"Wife?" Jim and Joyce echoed.

"N-no, we're just...we're just old friends," Joyce insisted.

"W-w-what?" Bill said, staring between the two incredulously. "I mean I knew you w-weren't married, b-but-"

"We all figured you were at least fucking or something," Richie finished, giving Joyce and Hopper a disappointed look, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Richard!" Liz exclaimed, her brow knit in an angry line. "I've told

you a thousand times to not use that language. Not in my presence."

Bev and Bill exchanged amused looks and Richie lowered his gaze, cheeks burning. "Sorry Mrs. Fischer," he mumbled.

"If you're here," Liz began, leering at Richie, "you might as well work on-"

"Aw no!" Richie shouted. "We were watching a movie!"

Liz, however, would not be moved. "I would like to have a discussion with Jim and...I'm so sorry, I didn't catch your name."

"It's Joyce," the other woman said. Joyce would never say it aloud, but she found Liz intimidating. With her big house and her posh way of speaking. She made Joyce feel very small.

If Liz knew how she made Joyce feel she made no sign of it. In fact, she gave her a big, friendly grin. "It's very nice to meet you Joyce. It'll be quite a relief to have another woman amid the madness."

Despite herself, Joyce smiled at this.

"What do you guys have to talk about that's so weird that we stupid kids can't be in on the chat?" Richie asked.

Liz glared at the boy, hands planed on her hips. She was about to point him towards the grand piano and tell him to be quiet. However, before she could Hopper said, "We need to talk about my daughter."

"El?" Joyce asked, wondering what might have happened with El. She hadn't seen her (or any of the other kids) since they left to try and close one of the gates.

Hopper shook his head. "No. We need to talk about Sara."

"Sara?" Joyce asked. She had known Sara, but she couldn't understand what she might have to do with all of this.

Richie, Bev, and Bill, however, all went silent and looked at each other. Though they didn't say a word their faces conveyed their words well enough. 'Oh fuck, how did he find out?' 'Does he know?'

He can't know...can he?' 'Dammit she's going to kill us when she finds out he knows.

"You three knew...didn't you?" Hopper asked, planting his hands on his hips and staring down at the kids.

"She made us promise not to tell you," Bev spat out before.

"Bev!" Richie exclaimed. "She's going to fucking kill you now!"

"Richard!" Liz shouted, sounding unlike her usual sophisticated and elegant self.

"What does Sara have to do with any of this, Hop?" Joyce asked, still confused.

"Nina is Sara," Hopper answered simply. His tone was calm, but beneath it all he was a bit of a wreck. 'You don't see me'. That was what she had said to him...that must have been when she remembered or figured it out. You don't see me...and he hadn't seen her...god, he was such a fucking idiot.

"What?" Joyce gasped. "Hop...Hop, are you sure?"

He nodded, fixing his jaw.

"Where is she?" Liz asked, realizing that her adoptive daughter wasn't present, despite the fact that her friends were.

"S-she's still not b-b-back yet," Bill answered, casting his eyes down. "No one else is either...it's just us."

I am such trash for Joyce and Hopper it's crazy...anyway, happy weekend! Updates might be a little slow. I have to do some job hunting because my boss is a grade A twat. I'll do my best though. Happy Friday to all! Also, next person to review is going to be review number 100! I'm gonna take a nap now. Next chapter won't be so...bleh.

34. Stitches

"Richard, what on earth have you done with your glasses?" Liz asked, giving the boy a dubious look as he entered through the kitchen. That was so odd. She could have sworn he was still in the sitting room playing the piano. Then again, it was possible he had turned on one of her records and snuck off. Still...something else was off. "Have you changed your clothes?"

Mike raised an eyebrow and chewed on his bottom lip before saying, "Um...no. I don't wear glasses."

Liz heaved an annoyed sigh and rolled her eyes, "Don't be absurd, Richard. Oh...hello...who're you?"

El raised an eyebrow at the woman. Was this another trick? Who was this woman? She seemed to know Richie. "Eleven," she answered, her voice small and quiet.

Liz's eyes went wide when El said this. The spoon she had been holding to mix the soup that Joyce, Bill, Bev, and Richie had made earlier fell into the pot with a loud plop and her mouth fell open. Of course, she had known about the other subjects. It was just different to actually see it. "Richard, why didn't you tell me?" she demanded, glaring at Mike.

Mike blinked at her very slowly before saying, "Because I'm not-"

"He's not Richie," a new voice said. "This is Mike Wheeler. He's from Hawkins."

Liz gasped when she saw her daughter. Adoptive or not, she was still her daughter. And she looked awful. She was covered in blood. Her clothes were ripped. Her eyes were bloodshot. "Oh my god, what happened to you? You look terrible."

Sara raised an eyebrow at her mom and said, "Thanks. That means so much to me."

"Don't be glib, you know what I mean!" Liz exclaimed as she pulled

the smaller girl into her arms, hugging her tightly as the rest of the fellowship started to pour into the kitchen.

Liz released Nina as quickly as she's embraced her when she heard the girl give a pained shout. When she was free, Sara was holding her ribs and wincing.

"What's going on?" Hopper asked as he entered the room, freezing when he found himself confronted with his daughter...his daughters

"Holy shit!" Richie exclaimed once he saw Sara. "What the hell happened to you?"

Liz glared at Richie but stopped herself from reprimanding him, mostly because she was wondering the same thing.

Before she could answer, Joyce was pulling her sons into a tight embrace, ignoring how Will protested. Liz watched the scene and smiled, happy that Joyce's children were back and safe. She could relate to the relief.

"I'm wondering the same thing," Jim said, looking Sara over. She was a bloody mess. There was dried blood coming from her ears, her nose, and a bit out of her mouth. That was concerning, but not nearly as worrying as her shirt. It had been white when she left, and intact as far as he could see. Now...that wasn't the case.

"It's nothing," Sara insisted, shifting uncomfortably under the watchful eyes of everyone. Sure, most of the fellowship looked worse for wear, but if it was a contest of who looked the most like shit she definitely would have won.

"It's not nothing," Dustin exclaimed, attracting the attention of nearly everyone, save for Sara and Hopper who held tight to each others' gaze. "There was this big ass bird," he began.

"Bird?" Liz asked, her nose wrinkled. "That doesn't make any sense. Birds love her. I can't even tell you how many times I've accidentally left a window opened and ended up with a flock of the little monsters in here."

Sara looked away from Hopper at last. "It's...a different sort of bird."

"It tried to kill us!" Eddie shouted, shoving his way between Dustin and Lucas so he could stare Liz in the eye as he made his declaration.

"And it was so big!" Will added, his tone almost a twin to Eddie's. "It was as big as a car and it was chasing us."

"It wasn't a bird," Stan deadpanned. "I mean, it was, but I've been birdwatching since I was seven. The biggest thing we've ever had here is a peregrine falcon."

"It was that It thing...wasn't it?" Lucas asked, not having forgotten what happened to the thing that looked like Steve's dad in the kitchen just the night before.

"It sure wasn't no sparrow," Mike (H.) scoffed.

Liz and Joyce both looked at each other, sharing thoughts and questions with each other in a way that only two friends could...perhaps that's what they were...or what they would be. Trauma had a way of bringing people together, and it seemed like Liz and Joyce would be going through their share of hell soon enough.

"Jonathan, is this true?" Joyce asked her older boy.

Jonathan shifted uncomfortably before admitting, "It's all true."

Nancy added, "It was...it wasn't normal."

"Where do you think you're going?" Hopper demanded.

Everyone turned from their conversation about the bird to Sara, who had tried to sneak off while everyone had their thoughts occupied elsewhere. "I was going to take a shower..." she admitted slowly. "Then I was going to take a nap."

"Lift your shirt," he ordered, his voice stern and serious.

"What the fuck!" she exclaimed, grabbing the hem of her shirt and giving it a firm yank downward. "Do you know how messed up that is?"

"Jesus Christ, man!" Richie shouted. "You don't just tell girls to take

their clothes off!"

"Officer Hopper!" Liz gasped, indignantly putting a hand on her chest.

"She's fifteen!" Mike (H.) snapped. "That's totally illegal!"

There were other outraged exclamations, but Hopper couldn't hear them.

"Shut up!" he shouted, silencing all of them. "Jesus Christ! I just want to make sure she doesn't need stitches!"

This managed to silence everyone.

Mostly everyone.

"I don't need stitches," Sara insisted, heading for the stairs anyway.

Bill didn't seem to think that was the case. "B-better safe than s-sorry," he said as he caught her wrist and tried to hold her still.

Sara, however, wasn't keen on making that so easy. She told Bill to get off her, but soon he wasn't the only problem. Richie took hold of her free hand and held her tight against him, holding her firmly around the ribs. "Apologies senorita," he told her, adopting a Mexican accent.

Bev, seeing that the boys weren't having any luck with getting Sara to hold still came up behind her and pulled her shirt up.

When Hopper went to examine her injuries she stopped trying to leave, but the boys held onto her anyway. "You're all a bunch of traitors," she grumbled.

Hopper smirked, but it disappeared when he saw that one of the three cuts on her stomach was too deep for comfort. "You're only two-thirds right," he sighed. "That one needs some stitches. We can either do it here or we can drag you to a hospital."

Knowing that the hospital would take more time she groaned and said, "Fine! Just get it over with. I'm tired and I'm disgusting and I don't want to be here!"

"Sorry," Richie began. For once he sounded sincere, but he shut up when he saw that she wasn't listening.

Hopper heaved a sigh, not sure how he was going to manage this. He heard her go into the bathroom so he assumed she wanted it done in there. Liz and Joyce tried to distract the others with promises of food. It was enough to get all of them to gather glasses and bowls for soup, but Richie wasn't so fast to join. "She'll be fine, kid," Hopper assured him after he'd gathered everything he'd need to stitch her up. Richie looked up at him and nodded before reluctantly joining his friends in the kitchen.

On his way to the bathroom, Hopper shook his head, wondering why his girls had such similar taste in boys. At least when it came to looks.

In the bathroom, Sara had peeled off her shirt and was only in her shorts and a sports bra. She didn't look up when he entered. She was sitting on the toilet, her arms folded on the sink and her chin resting in the nook of one of her elbows. Hopper was about to shut the door behind him when Blue dashed into the bathroom, diving between his legs to get to Sara, tail wagging erratically as she put her forepaws onto the sink and started frantically licking Sara's face.

"That dog really loves you," Hopper said, shaking his head as he watched the girl scratch the dog's ears and tell her to calm down. Blue whined but did as she was told, sprawling out on top of Sara's feet.

"We've been through a lot together," Sara admitted before leaning back against the sink. "Can we...you know...get this over with?"

Hopper wasn't as eager to finish their interaction as she was, but with a sigh, he knelt down on the ground next to her and started swapping the cuts with some alcohol. He saw her wince, but she didn't make a sound as he worked on her injuries. Always had to be tough. What a surprise.

"Were you ever planning on telling me?" he asked as he burned the tip of the needle before dipping it in the rubbing alcohol.

She was silent for a few seconds before she answered. "Yes...not like that, but yes."

"And how long have you known?" Hopper asked as he got to work threading the needle, still refusing to look at her, which was fine because she was refusing to look at him too.

"Since I got out of the pool at Steve's house," she admitted before asking, "Where is Steve?"

"Sleeping still, I think," Hopper answered. "Kid didn't get to bed until at least noon. That...thing...really messed him up."

Sara shrugged, "That's what it does. It thrives off of fear."

"How did you get the mind flayer to give Liz up?" he asked before he could forget. He'd been wondering about that since his strange conversation with the creature.

She gave him a dubious look before answering, "Because I'm a genius. Obviously." He raised an eyebrow at her, making it clear he wasn't going to settle for that as an answer. "Fine. The thing about the mind flayer is that he is REALLY conceited. Like...so conceited it's ridiculous. He can't quite wrap his brain around the idea that doing something I'm dreading just a bit won't completely disable me. I think he views me as a higher caliber of human because I can do what he can do. Plus he can't get in my head so I think he assumes I'm as stuck up as he is. Ow!"

Hopper gave her an impatient look as he pulled the needle away. "Did you think it was going to get licked on by kittens or something?"

"No, but give me a little warning before you impale me if you don't mind," she retorted, indignantly.

Rolling his eyes Hopper said, "I'm going to impale you now."

"That sounds so wrong," she replied.

He smirked. "You said it, not me."

He had put a few stitches in her largest wound before he asked,

"So...what do you want to do?"

Sara shook her head, wincing a bit as he tugged another stitch closed. She'd had worse, but she wasn't a fan of this. "I don't know. It's..."

"A lot to handle?" Hopper asked as tied the stitching closed and cut the thread. "Yeah, believe me, I know."

"Can I-" Sara began.

Hopper nodded and stood up, rubbing the blood from giving her stitches off his hands and onto his jeans. "Yeah...yeah you wanted to take a shower and a nap. I'll just...I'll save some soup for you...for when you wake up."

"Thank you." He was about to open the door and leave when she said, "Dad?"

Hopper froze, his hand still on the handle. Something about her calling him dad again for the first time. He looked over his shoulder and said, "Yeah?"

"I'm sorry that I didn't tell you. I...I was scared,"

"Scared?" He asked, incredulous. "Of me?"

"Of being forgotten," she admitted, looking away from him.

Unable to stop himself, Hopper gave her a single, short laugh. "You were always a lot of things. Smart, observant,"

"Stubborn," she offered.

This made him laugh so loud and hard that it made Blue start. "Oh my god SO stubborn...but...you were never forgotten."

She looked up at him and gave him a small smile. "I know."

*okay so in my next chapter I can't decide who to fixate on so...who do you guys wanna see more Of? leave me a review and let me know *insert awkward wink face and finger guns here**

35. The Observation Room

Will would have killed for a chance at a normal life again. Camping out in the basement, playing D&D, riding bikes. It all seemed like it was a lifetime ago. Before the Demogorgon came. He wished more than anything that he could go back to being blissfully ignorant and stupid. However, at least he knew there was something out there.

It felt more dangerous, but somehow it made him safer. It made all of them safer. His brother. His mom. His friends. The chief. He didn't want what had happened to him in the Upside Down to happen to any of them. Hell, he didn't want it to happen to anyone else. He wouldn't have wished it on his worst enemy. Well...maybe he'd wish it on Brenner...maybe Troy.

He had wandered off while everyone else had settled down for the chief to tell everyone who didn't know his daughter was his daughter. He already knew so he decided to keep his distance. He didn't want anyone asking him any questions. Besides, he figured that Hopper could have used some space and with his friends and the losers he didn't know. Will being there would only make things more complicated.

Now, he'd heard of the observation room, vaguely, but he hadn't expected he would see it. It was amazing! There were two chalkboards filled with complex math on it. There were star charts and maps, not just pointing out the commonly known constellations like Orion and the dippers, but constellations he'd never even heard of. There was a balcony that was covered in glass so that the room could still be used in winter. The balcony went out in an area that wasn't obscured by trees. Even with the lights on, he could see a beautiful stretch of cloudless sky. He could only imagine how much more vibrant the sky would be with the lights off so he went to go shut them off. For scientific reasons, of course.

Needless to say, Will had not been expecting another person to enter the room at that time. Startled, both he and Eddie leaped apart from each other, screaming like a pair of idiots. When they silenced and realized what had happened they stared at each other for a few seconds, trying to get their brains to catch up with what had

happened.

"Will?" Joyce's worried voice called from down the stairs. "Sweetheart, are you okay?"

Will and Eddie glanced down the stairs again before they burst out laughing. "We're fine, mom!" Will shouted down the stairs, still laughing.

"Sorry," Eddie said once they managed to stop laughing a bit. "I didn't think anyone was in here."

Will shrugged, "It's fine. I was just going to turn the light off."

"Oh, to see the sky through the balcony?" Eddie asked, stepping into the room and shutting the room behind. "Yeah, that's what I was coming to do too. It's kind of...anarchy down there. Everyone's pretty shocked about Nina not being Nina. You...already knew that though, didn't you?"

Will nodded, glancing down. "Yeah...I promised I wouldn't tell. I figure she would have told the rest of her friends here, but-"

"Yeah, she didn't really get much of a chance," Eddie sighed, flipping the light switch off. "No one's mad at her for not telling us. We're just...worried she'll be leaving."

Will and Eddie began to head towards the glass balcony together and Richie rubbed the back of his neck nervously. "Yeah...I guess I'd be a bit worried if Nina was like...Mike or Lucas or Dustin."

"I guess her name's actually Sara," Eddie said, rubbing the back of his neck.

They were quiet for a while, standing in the open, looking up under the sheets of glass protecting them from the wind outside. They didn't say anything because they didn't need to. Still, there was a bit of tension between them. Neither of them said what it was, or why they felt it, but it was there like a fog settled over them.

"You're afraid of birds, aren't you?" Eddie asked suddenly, not taking his eyes off the stars above them.

"What?" Will asked, taken aback by this, partially because it was true and because he hadn't been expecting the question.

Eddie shrugged, "Well I figured it was one of you guys. We've already faced It and I don't think our greatest fears would have changed all that much. Plus...you looked like you were the most scared."

"I think we were all pretty scared," Will insisted. "I was in the upside down. You'd think my biggest fear would be the mind flayer or...something."

"Yeah, but now you've met hellbenders and Fellbeast so they might not be as scary anymore. Plus, Pennywise...It...whatever you want to call him...he finds what you're afraid of, deep in your subconscious. Something that traumatized the fuck out of you."

"You have F word in you that can get traumatized out of you?" Will asked dubiously.

Eddie raised an eyebrow at this. "Dude, what are you? Seven? Just say fuck."

Will shook his head, "I dunno...I've never-"

"Just say it!" Eddie prodded.

"What if my mom hears?" Will laughed.

Eddie made a 'pfft' noise and said, "Man, fuck your mom."

"That's disgusting," Will countered.

Nodding, Eddie agreed, "Yeah...I'd never fuck your mom."

Will glared at Eddie and proclaimed "My mother is a beautiful woman."

"Oh, I'm not arguing that," Eddie said. "Your mom's cool, she's just...not my type."

"Well good because I'd kick your butt," Will declared.

"Ass," Eddie corrected. "Just say ass. Ass and fuck. It's not that hard."

"Alright," Will said. "I'll say both if you tell me what that thing turned into for you."

Eddie glared up at Will. He was shorter than Will, but he was shorter than just about everyone. Still, that didn't stop him. With his friends to help get his mom off his ass, he had come to learn that he wasn't delicate and weak like his mom liked to make him feel. Sure, he might have weighed about seven pounds, but he was seven pounds of whoop-ass...usually. He didn't always whip out the whoop ass, but he knew it was there. "You really want me to relive that shit?"

Will shrugged and looked away, searching the sky for another constellation. If Eddie didn't want to tell him then Will wouldn't force him to. However, if Eddie wouldn't tell him then Will wouldn't say Ass or The F Word.

With an aggravated sigh Eddie said, "Fine. So...there was this guy...my mom took me down to the slums one day to get a really good luck at...the people there. She lectured me all about boozing it up. Syphilis...AIDs. Anyway, there was this guy there...I know he probably didn't have leprosy, but that's the only thing I could think of. He was covered in sores and his face...god, his face was so fucked up. His nose was gone and one of his eyes was all filmy."

Will grimaced at the description. "That's...seriously disturbing."

"Yeah, I know," Eddie replied, crossing his arms and glaring up at the sky to avoid looking at Will. "He offered to give me a blowjob for a dollar."

"A what?" Will asked.

Eddie turned from the sky to give Will a look. A look that, without speaking a word, said 'are you stupid?'. "I take it you've never had...the talk."

"Jonathan's explained the basics to me," Will admitted with a shrug. "My mom tried going more into detail, but there was no way in hell I wanted to have that conversation with her."

Eddie laughed at this, "Yeah...I'd rather kill myself than have a discussion like that with my mom again."

"Again?" Will asked.

Eddie went quiet for about a minute before saying, "I've never told anyone."

"Well friends don't lie," Will stated thoughtfully, "but they do keep secrets if they need to."

"Are we friends?" Eddie asked.

"I dunno," Will admitted. "I think it's hard to go through what we went through today and not be friends."

"That's fair, I guess," Eddie thought aloud.

"I didn't rat Sara out," Will said.

Eddie let that thought seep into his mind for a few moments before saying, "I'm...not like most guys."

"Yeah, I know what that's like," Will scoffed.

"I doubt it," Eddie grumbled.

"Oh yeah?" Will challenged.

Eddie turned and glared up at Will, "Yeah. I was an idiot and told my mom that I don't like girls like most guys do and she gave me a fucking lecture about AIDs and Syphilis. The motherfucker didn't have a nose!"

This took Will aback, "You mean...you're?"

"I'm fucking gay!" Eddie exclaimed before glancing at the door, worried someone might be listening in.

"Really?" Will asked. Despite his efforts, he was smiling.

"It's not funny you dick!" Eddie shouted, clenching his hands into fists and scowling at Will, wishing he was a few inches taller. He usually

wished he was taller though. Still, he didn't need to be tall to kick Will's ass.

Will laughed and raised his hands defensively, taking a step back. "It's not that, I just know what you're going through."

"You're gay?" Eddie asked, his hand unclenching.

"I mean...I don't know," Will sighed. "I mean...can you only be like...half gay?"

"Half gay?" Eddie repeated.

"I like guys, but...I like girls too," Will admitted. "I kind of had a thing for my friend, Mike for a while. I never did anything about it though because he was so crazy depressed about El. I dated this girl for a few weeks...she was nice and all, but I was kind of hung up on Mike. Then I met Richie and thought...maybe...but then he wouldn't shut the hell up."

This made Eddie laughed so hard he couldn't breathe for about a minute. "Dude...you can do better than Richie. Richie's a pain in the ass."

"But...he's your friend," Will said.

"Worse," Eddie commented with a sigh. "He's my best friend. That doesn't make him any less of a pain in the ass, though. I won't tell anyone you're kind of gay if you don't tell anyone I'm all the way gay?"

Will chuckled and stuck out his hand to shake Eddie's, "Deal."

They caught each other's eye for a moment before they hastily released each other and looked back up at the sky, cheeks burning.

"So...you never said fuck or ass," Eddie said, rubbing the back of his neck.

Will sighed, but said, "Ass and fuck."

Nodding, Eddie replied, "Bitchin'."

There was silence for about another minute when Will pointed out, "There's Draco."

"Have you ever...with a guy?" Eddie asked, face burning.

Will raised an eyebrow at this. He felt awkward doing things with himself sometimes, but he didn't need to tell Eddie that. "I'm a virgin, dude," he deadpanned, his face also burning.

"I'm not talking about sex!" Eddie exclaimed, glancing at the door, worried someone might have heard him. "I mean...just...nothing, never mind. It was a stupid thought."

"I highly doubt I'm going to think it was stupid," Will insisted.

In a moment of madness or bravery, whatever you'd like to call it, Eddie shot up onto his tiptoes and planted a firm kiss right on Will's mouth, effectively silencing him. Eddie pulled away before Will got over the initial shock of what had happened. Eddie was already almost out the door, apologizing as he left. Will had to jog to catch up to him, but he did. He caught the smaller boy by the arm and pulled him to a stop. "You don't have to apologize, Eddie," he insisted.

With his face bright scarlet and his eyes darting anywhere but to Will, "No, I should have asked first."

"It would have been awkward then," Will said with a shrug.

"It's awkward now!" Eddie declared.

With a laugh, Will shook his head and said, "It's only awkward if we make it awkward. Come look for constellations with me. It's going to be crazy out there and...it's nice here."

Eddie hesitated but eventually agreed. They went back to the glass covered balcony. The boys laid on the ground so they wouldn't have to crane their necks to see the sky. Eddie wasn't as good at finding the patterns in the sky as Will was, but he didn't seem to mind. It wasn't long before the boys fell into a comfortable silence, eyes on the skies and their hands clasped together. Neither Will or Eddie was sure as to who took whose hand, but neither of them really cared all

that much.

So...when I asked what you guys wanted more of...I was kind of hoping you'd go for some of the more underrated characters. Like Will and Eddie, maybe. I know it's not what ANY of you asked for, both on here and on ArchiveOfOurOwn (where I also have this story posted now that my account there works if you want to find me there and say hi)...however...every single request I got was for more Sara. Now, don't get it twisted, there will definately be more Sara and I love that everyone wants more of her. It fills my heart with happy bubbles. There will be El and Sara getting to know each other, more nonsense on the Sara/Richie/Dustin situation, but in this moment in time Sara is either in the shower or asleep so I'm using this opportunity to touch on those I haven't touched on as much (god that sounds so wrong). Anyway, I know there's at least one Reddie shipper out there who might not be too happy, but I've been planning on Will and Eddie hooking up for a while now. It used to be Will and Richie, but then the stoy had different plans than my brain. Richie is...a little preoccupied. Also, I highly doubt any of you were expecting our first kiss of the story (except for El and Mike...I think...I dunno, have I had them kiss? I feel like I have, but I'm also not sure) anyway, I bet you weren't expecting it to be these two! Surprise! Yeah...but I'm trying to leave Sara alone for a little bit, but don't worry, I will fulfil your Sara needs. I promise. Now...any requests that aren't Sara related? Any that are will still be seen and accounted for, but let the poor girl shower and sleep. I was thinking El and Mike (I feel like I've been neglecting them), Joyce and Hopper, or Max, Bev, Lucas, and Steve. Mike Hanlon needs more love too, but I have plans for him. He's not forgotten. Neither is Stan, who I also have plans for. Anyway, let me know. Send me a PM or leave me a review. I love hearing from you guys. Byeee!

36. Friends Don't Lie

El stared up into the expressionless face (or lack thereof) of Fellbeast, who made clicking noises to look her over with his sonar. He looked a bit like a giant, bald bat, his wings folded in and his head cocked as he looked down at her.

Slowly, carefully, she reached up to touch him. If he hurt her...she'd break his neck. If he hurt anyone she would break his neck. The same went for Porthos, Aramis, and Athos. She didn't trust them. Not now.

She ignored the part of her that had said that she was being silly. Fellbeast had helped save them all from the giant bird that had chased them to the clubhouse. She'd seen the injuries that Nina had gotten trying to draw the thing away from them. Still, El was unclear about what the girl had been doing. Was she on Fellbeast's back? It seemed possible, but El wasn't really sure. Still...that was before. Before she'd found out that her new friend who had gone through hell in Hawkins' Lab just like her...she wasn't her friend at all.

Friends don't lie and Nina or Sara or whatever she was...she had lied to all of them. She'd gotten Will to lie to all of them too. She had trusted her. She had trusted both of them and it turned out that they were both liars. They weren't her friends. Maybe they'd never been.

Worst of all...her dad...well...it looked like he wasn't going to be her dad anymore. Why would he need her when he had his real daughter back? She knew he was glad that she was alive and well. She couldn't really fault him for that, but...where did that leave her?

For a moment, she considered breaking Fellbeast's neck despite the fact that he hadn't hurt her. No one was here. They wouldn't know. All she'd have to do is tell them that he'd gone rogue and tried to kill her and no one would fault her for it. Mike, Max, Lucas, and Dustin would back her up. Will wouldn't. He had betrayed her. None of her friends had betrayed her before, but she understood how much it hurt. Recalling how Lucas had reacted to thinking she was a traitor...she understood.

Fellbeast made a few more clicking noises before he nuzzled against

her. This surprised her so much that he nearly shoved her over, but he wasn't trying to be rude or hurt her. He was rubbing up against her like a cat. I giant winged...bald cat. She fixed her jaw, forcing herself to not get upset. He wasn't mean. He had protected her and her friends. Just because he had joined their side because of Sara didn't make him any less on their side. Warily, she wrapped her arms around his head, hugging his head towards her. The noises it made were suddenly much louder. She could have sworn that Fellbeast was purring and that made her laugh.

"Hey, El."

She looked up and saw Mike, looking at her and Fellbeast like they were the most insane pair he'd ever seen. Maybe they were. Fellbeast grumbled a bit at the interruption, but El released him. He took his as his queue to go, shaking out his wings and taking off into the sky.

Mike joined El in staring up, watching the beast fly off. "I've seen a lot of things," Mike began, "but I never thought I'd see a dragon."

"Do you think that's what he is?" El asked. "Sara might disagree." There was a bite in her voice when she said Sara's name. Perfect Miss Sara. She could get into people's heads, she could turn a monster into a friend, she was smart. El was used to people being smarter than her. Mike was smarter than her. Dustin was smarter than her. All of her friends were smarter than her, really. That never made her feel bad, though. Not before Sara. Sara made her feel small and stupid. She didn't try to, but that didn't mean anything.

Mike, however, was kind of dumb when it came to girls. Most girls. El was different. He could read her like a book. Not that she was making it hard. He wasn't surprised, though. Hopper had just dropped a bomb on her. He had tried to talk to her about it, but El wasn't in a talking kind of mood. Mike didn't think that she'd have a problem talking to him though. "I don't think she wanted to hurt you, El."

She turned and glared at him. "She lied, Mike," El growled. "She lied. Will lied. Friends. Don't. Lie."

"Can you really blame her, though?" Mike asked. "I mean, we're all

practically strangers. And Hopper said that she found out right after she got you out of the in-between. She was probably scared. I mean...what about when you were messing with the compasses?"

She glared at him but didn't say anything. She really didn't like him using that against her...justifiable as it may be. "That was different," she said, turning away from him and looking at one of the hellbenders as they prowled around the house, sniffing to make sure nothing got too close.

"Not really," Mike said. "I mean, yeah, friends don't lie, but...they do forgive."

El's mouth turned into a hard frown. She couldn't deny that. Lucas had forgiven her. Could she forgive Sara though? "I'm scared, Mike," she admitted at last.

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and gently pulled her into him. "What're you scared of?"

El bit her lip and considered the question for a few minutes before she knew the answer. "She's going to replace me," she said, keeping her gaze down.

"What?" Mike exclaimed, unable to keep the amused smile off his face. "You're afraid she's going to replace you?"

"She's his daughter," she said, her eyes glazing over as they met his, hurt that he was amused by something that horrified her so badly.

"You're the chief's daughter too," Mike said, taking her cheek in his hand and brushing away a tear that was starting to spill from her eyes. He placed his forehead against hers and forced her to meet his eyes. "If she comes back to Hawkins with us you won't be losing a dad. You'll be gaining a sister. Don't you remember how excited you were when you thought Nancy was going to be your sister?"

She considered his thoughts on the matter. He did make sense. Still...there was doubt. "He'll stop caring about me, though. He won't love me anymore."

Mike closed the distance between their lips and kissed her softly.

When he pulled away he fixed her with his eyes, which were soft and understanding. "Love doesn't work that way, El. I didn't love Nancy any less because Holly was born. Besides...I think you'll like having a sister."

"Like Kali?" she asked, her eyes narrowing. She hadn't told anyone about Kali...just Mike.

Mike glanced at the house. Based off what El had told him about Kali she wasn't exactly the type of person you wanted to associate with. He was aware that El had killed before, but that was different. That was in self-defense. That was to protect her friends. Kali killed for revenge. They weren't the same. And while he didn't know Sara very well, he did know Will. Will had seen into her head. He would never have lied about Sara's true origins if he thought that she couldn't be trusted. He trusted Will's judgment on this. He just hoped El would too.

"I really don't think that Sara's like Kali," Mike said. "Will would have told us."

"Will lied," El repeated. Obviously, she wasn't going to let go of that so easily.

"And I'm sure he had his reasons," Mike countered. "Look, I know this is hard. It must suck. Like REALLY suck, but did you ever think that Sara might have wanted to keep who she was a secret because she was afraid you and Hopper wouldn't like her?"

She went silent for a moment and considered his words for a moment. "I guess I hadn't thought of that."

"I'm sure that she had a good reason," Mike smiled, sure he was getting through to her.

Unfortunately, her brow furrowed into a scowl again. "Why do you trust her so much?"

"I don't trust her," he sighed. "I trust Will, and Will trusts her. We can talk to her, and Will, in the morning, but I think...just maybe...you should cool down before you talk to them. Plus...Sara kind of looks

like shit. She could use some rest."

She looked away from him to one of the hellbenders, who was looking at them in its odd way. This one's face was half gray and speckled with white splotches. He sat down and cocked his head at them. He almost looked like a dog. El wished she could have been able to make the demogorgon kind rather than killing it. It seemed like the creatures from the upside down were excellent allies to have.

"Alright," she said at last. "I'll talk to her tomorrow."

"And try to be nice," Mike added, a hint of sternness in his voice.

Rolling her eyes, El agreed, "And try to be nice."

With a smile, Mike said, "Good. Now...what do you want to do?"

El gave him a sly smile before wrapping her arms around his neck. He'd gotten a lot taller. He was about a head taller than her now. She didn't mind, though. She liked it. Though, she would have liked him still even if he was too short to kiss her. She'd just have to bend over to reach him. "Well...there's no one out here...and I think we can find something to do."

Mike glanced over at a darker area where he was pretty sure no one would be able to see them from the house. El as good as read his mind and started to yank him into the shadows. Once they reached the wall they were both laughing like a pair of kids, but that didn't last long. All it took for them to quiet down was when Mike pulled her tightly against him and gave her another kiss, this one longer and harder.

Okay so...I know no one asked for Joyce and Hopper, but they're coming next! I have a solid game plan now. Then some Lumax, Bev, and Steve. After that is a surprise. I'll maybe put some Jonathan and Nancy in with Hopper and Joyce, but I'm excited to actually know where this is going. I already knew, but I have it in order now. But behold! MILEVEN! Look at these two, growing up and acting like horny teenagers.

37. Dirty Dishes

"This is...it's crazy," Nancy said as she sat around the dining room table with Hopper, Joyce, Liz, and Jonathan. Steve might have joined them, but he claimed that the kids in the basement needed looking after. He probably wasn't wrong. "I mean...are you sure that Nina is your daughter?"

Hopper rolled his eyes before taking the photo of Sara when she was younger and the one of her with Liz and her late husband. He pushed them to Nancy and asked, "Can you honestly say those two girls aren't the same?"

Nancy looked at the pictures, moving them over so that Jonathan could get a better look at them. As much as she wanted to deny that it was true...the proof was right in front of her. It had been bad enough, the government taking Eleven, and who knew who else, as babies for their lab rat program, but Sara...she had been five when she was taken. They'd faked her death and stolen her from her family. They could all fuck themselves. How many other children had they stolen in this fashion? She wanted them to pay for Hopper. She and Jonathan had gotten the lab shut down, but that was barely a dent on their ego. She wanted to hit them where it could hurt them...but how?

"We should tell Murray Bauman," she said, putting the photos back down and pushing them back across the table.

Hopper fixed her with an annoyed look. "Nancy...you're a smart girl...so I'm a bit horrified that you would say something so stupid."

She glared at him and asked, "You don't want revenge?"

"I want peace," Hopper countered. "I want this to be over."

"And what about Sara?" Nancy asked.

"Sara?" Liz asked. "You think she wants revenge?"

"It would make sense," Jonathan said. He wasn't really sure where he

stood on the issue, but it looked like Nance was standing alone. He didn't want her to feel like he wouldn't back her up.

Shaking her head Liz said, "She wouldn't want revenge. She could have taken it if she wanted. Elton had connections in the government. After the part he played with Apollo 11...well, you don't do what he did without making friends in high places. He offered, but she begged him not to. She's terrified of going back there."

"She's never going back there again," Hopper growled.

"There's got to be other kids, though," Nancy exclaimed. "What about them?"

"What about Sara and Jane?" Liz asked before Hopper could answer. "They deserve a say in this. Besides, it's not like anyone would believe us."

Nancy looked at the older woman with a disgusted look on her face. "How can you be willing to stand back and let more kids suffer like they did?"

"Nancy," Hopper began, a warning in his voice and his eyes narrowed.

It was too late, though. Liz glared at Nancy and, for a moment, considered throwing the girl out of her house. She didn't, though. They were all involved now. She'd best get used to it. "Sara may be Officer Hopper's daughter by blood, but she has lived in my home and called me her mother for more than a year now. Nearly two! Don't you think I know how that place has affected her? She has night terrors about that place still."

Hopper nodded solemnly at this, "El does too. Sometimes they're so bad that she makes the entire house shake."

"What does that have to do with this?" Nancy demanded.

"Going after them again puts them at risk," Hopper explained, leaning forward and fixing her with a stern eye. "It could ruin their shot at having a normal life. Do you really want to do that to them?"

Nancy glared at the table, not wanting to look at any of the adults. She hadn't thought of it that way. Under the table, Jonathan took her hand. That made her feel a bit better, but not much. Perhaps it was selfish of her to want to go after the government again, especially if it put Sara and El at risk. They were right. Doing anything without them agreeing to it would be unfair to them. "No...I don't want to do that."

"I think we could all use some rest," Joyce suggested, trying to be the peacekeeper in the heated discussion that had broken out.

Liz heaved a sigh knowing that Joyce was right. Not that she was too eager to go back to her room. The last time she had slept there her husband had been alive. "That, I believe, is the smartest thing anyone has said tonight."

Liz had begun to collect the cups of coffee they'd been drinking (tea, in her case) so that she could take the dishes to the sink, but Joyce stopped her. "Liz, let me do that."

"Oh, no, Joyce, I couldn't," Liz said, pulling her empty teacup closer to her. She would be an awful hostess if she did that. Her mother, a well to do long dead upper-class British woman, would have never let her daughter hear the end of it.

"Liz," Joyce said the other woman's name so adamantly that she actually stopped. "You've been through hell today. And you're still letting us all stay here. I'm more than happy to clean up. Go and take a nice relaxing bath or something. I've got this."

As much as Liz hated to admit it, Joyce's suggestion sounded amazing. She made sure it was alright a few more times before she left. Jonathan and Nancy claimed they were tired and wanted to go to sleep. Neither Joyce or Hopper believed them for a minute, but Joyce gave her son a stern look that implied that if they did anything...more and he didn't use protection she would kill him. He and Nancy were going to college next year. She didn't want to worry about a grandchild for at least another five years. Their unspoken exchange made Jonathan's cheeks blaze. He knew full well where his mother's concerns lie...and he knew they weren't unfounded.

"You wash I dry?" Hopper asked, nodding towards the sink full of undone dishes.

She tried to glare at him, but a small smile played at the corners of her mouth. "What if I want to dry?"

Shrugging, Hopper said, "If that's the case you're on your own."

She playfully swatted his arm and he chuckled before taking his place at the sink with her, rinsing and drying the dishes. For a while, they stayed in a comfortable silence, eyes forward and thoughts locked away. Joyce, however, wanted to pick that lock. "Are you doing okay, Hop?" she asked, looking up at him as she handed him another bowl.

Hopper wanted to laugh her question off, but he didn't. He heaved a sigh and dried his hands off on a dishcloth before flipping the rag onto his shoulder and leaning against the counter, arms folded. "I don't know. I mean, on the one hand...Sara's alive. And she's...she's an amazing kid. I always knew she was smart, but she's possibly the smartest person I've ever met and she's still just a kid!" There was a touch of pride in his voice, but he was beginning to frown. There was a but coming. Anyone with half a brain could see that. "I mean...it's amazing. It's all I wanted since she died...since I thought she died. But...it's just all so messed up. And El...Jesus, did you see the way she looked at me when I told everyone? I should have told her first and then told everyone. She looked so..."

"Hindsight's 20/20 Hop," Joyce assured him as she linked his arm through his and took his hand in hers, trying to be reassuring. "She'll calm down. This is a mess, but...we'll figure it out."

"We will?" he asked, fixating on the word 'we' as he laced his fingers between hers.

They looked at each other and Joyce's breath caught in her throat. There it was again. She wasn't unfamiliar with this feeling. She'd gotten it in her gut every now and then since she was a stupid teenager. Since before she and Lonny had hooked up. Since before Jonathan was born. Since before Sara was born. It came back again after Hopper had come back to Hawkins, but they were both so broken then. Neither of them could be what the other needed,

but...maybe now they could.

Nodding she repeated, "We will."

It was unclear who kissed who first. That became unimportant. Jim had to bend low and crane his neck so their mouths could reach each other, but he couldn't care less about that. She clung to his shoulders and his fingers tangled in her hair. This wasn't their first kiss. There had been a few, small exchanges back in high school, but it had been so long. He didn't realize how long until he felt the need for her like a dying man in the desert.

"You know, you two are really shitty about lying about not dating."

Joyce and Hopper sprung apart at the interruption. It didn't take long to find the intruder.

"Sara!" Jim exclaimed. "I...I thought you were sleeping."

Sara was trying her best to not burst out laughing at the scene she had stumbled upon. "Yeah...yeah, I was. Then I woke up because I was thirsty...and clearly I wasn't the only one."

Joyce and Jim both flushed at this and it was the end of her attempt to remain stoic. She burst out into a fit of giggles, covering her mouth with her hand. When Mike and El entered the kitchen from the outside...that was the end of everything. Her giggles turned into a roar. Her face was red and tears were streaming from their eyes. This made the pink blushes on Joyce and Jim's faces become bright hot and red as El and Mike stared between the adults and Sara.

"Oh my god," Sara said once she regained some of her resolves. "Oh my god, El...Jane, I have to tell you," she couldn't get the rest of her sentence out as another gale of laughter possessed her. Mike and El both looked mildly concerned at how amused she was. She got a hold of herself again and said, "Come on, I have to tell you, this...oh my god...unless you already know...I have to tell someone though!"

"Is that necessary?" Hopper growled, glaring at Sara.

This only made her laugh more. "I either tell Jane alone in my room or I tell everyone in the damn house."

"You...want to tell me a secret?" El asked. This took her aback. Secrets were for friends. She looked at Mike and he gave her a reassuring smile. Still, she was wary.

"Come on!" Sara exclaimed. "If I don't tell you soon I might explode!"

This startled El. "You can explode from not sharing secrets?"

Sara considered this for a few seconds before saying, "Not...exactly. But we can't tell anyone else. He'll kill us."

El gave Hopper an appalled look and he exclaimed, "She means metaphorically!"

Bouncing on her toes Sara repeated, "Come on come on, let's go!"

El only followed when Mike encouraged her to go. She didn't look as amused or giddy as Sara though, who was still smirking at her discovery, eager to share the news with her father's other daughter. She wouldn't go as far as to call El her sister. They weren't there yet. Still, family ties had to begin somewhere.

"I guess this is the end of my privacy," Hopper said as he watched his girls climb the stairs and vanish from view. He heaved a sigh and went to the sink to fill up a cup of cold water.

By the time it was full Sara was barreling back down the stairs. Before she could get to the cupboard he offered the cup to her. She took it and thanked him briefly. Before leaving again she looked her dad and Joyce in the eye and announced, "For what it's worth, I think it's great...good night!" Then she was gone again, rushing back up the stairs.

Hopper watched her go, shaking his head. "I'll never really understand that kid...neither of them, really."

Joyce rubbed his shoulder and offered him a weak smile. "Welcome to parenthood."

Mike just shook his head and went to head to the basement. He didn't have a clue as to what was going on, but if it could help El and Sara get past their differences he was alright with being left in the dark on

this.

*Me: *tells everyone Sara will be AWOL for a few chapters**

*Me: *imagines Sara walking in on Hopper and Joyce kissing and then gossiping to El about it**

Me: ...Fuck.

Clearly, I have no self control. Also, if you like playlists and have Spotify...it's possible I made a few based off this story. You don't HAVE to check them out, but if you want to I'll give you their names. Let's see, there's one for Nichie (but since Sara is out of the identity closet it's called Sichie), there's one for Dustin and Sara, but since no one ever came up with a ship name for them I did it myself. It's Dara. Then there's Sichie vs. Dara. There's one for Jim and his girls called Hoppers. Just Hoppers. And, last but not least, is Weddie (Will and Eddie)! Anyway, that's all for now! Have a good weekend. Also, I can't decide if I want Max in on the gossip or not...thoughts? Love you guys, bye!

38. Slumber Party

Sara's room was almost three times the size of El's was. Not that it was a contest. Still...El was a bit bitter about it. Stupid Sara with everything. For the most part, the room was very much like Sara was. There as a big bookshelf full of books. It seemed to be full of an assortment of novels and science books that El wouldn't have been able to understand if she spent months studying them.

It looked like the room had initially been meant to be girly and cute. Her bed was a massive white fourposter king with a dark violet comforter. There was a matching vanity on the wall by the door, but the rest of the room had been taken over by Sara's own...unique taste. The walls, which were painted a light gray color, were covered in posters. There were two for Pat Benatar (Sara's favorite singer). There was also The Cars, Black Sabbath, Kiss, Def Leppard, Poison, Foreigner, and Cyndi Lauper. There were also posters of galaxies and constellations. On a corkboard next to her vanity was a myriad of polaroid pictures of her with her adoptive parents and all of her friends. There was one picture of her and Elton Fischer standing in front of a rocket, him in a lab coat and her in a NASA shirt. There were a few shots of her and Bev dressed up in some of Liz's old stage costumes. There was one of her and Mike (H.) standing back to back with a pair of airsoft guns. There was a set of photobooth pictures of her and Richie the first time she'd gone to see a movie. Those were just some of her favorites.

There was a record player on the vanity and another, smaller shelf with an assortment of records. They ranged from Johnny Cash to Aerosmith to opera and Max was sitting on the bed she had made for herself on the floor the night before, looking at Sara's collection, setting aside the ones the caught her interest. She looked up when she heard El and Sara enter the room. She had assumed it would be alright to come in and make herself at home when she had seen that Sara wasn't in there and the light was on. She was sleepy, however, and had planned on going to sleep anyway. She'd only decided to snoop through the records because she didn't have the chance to do it the day before.

Before she could apologize for trifling through Sara's things El asked, "Max, can we have some time alone?"

Max opened her mouth to answer, or to ask if El thought that was such a good idea, but before she could get a word out Sara said, "No, she can stay, it's fine."

This only made Max warier. Did she really want to be in here where El probably wanted to rip Sara's hair out? No...probably not.

"You said we couldn't tell anyone else," El said, eyes narrowing suspiciously.

As she shut the door behind her Sara said, "Max is a girl. It'll be fine. Is Bev here?"

"Wait a minute...are you trying to...gossip with El?" Max asked, slowly realizing what was happening.

"No..." Sara paused and considered for a moment before saying. "Yes. But it's bitchin', I have to tell!"

"Bitchin'?" El repeated a small smile on her mouth. None of her friends said bitchin' except for her. She hadn't expected Sara to say it.

"Bitchin' as fuck!" Sara repeated as she jumped onto her bed and patted on it, encouraging Max and El to sit on the bed with her. El and Max both looked at each other, silently questioning if they should or should not join her on the bed. True, they'd slept here the night before, but she and Max had slept on the floor. Only Bev was comfortable enough to take the bed, having slept in it her share of times. "This bed is big enough to fit, like, eight of us," Sara said when they didn't join her on the bed right away. "Come on, it's not like I'm going to bite you guys."

Finally, Max and El climbed into the bed, El slipping out of her shoes before following. When they were all in the bed Sara folded her legs under her, leaned forward, and began to share her tale. When she finished, El and Max looked at each other before El declared, "I knew it!"

Max nodded and laughed a bit, "It's about time if you ask me...you're

okay with this? I mean...he's your dad."

El didn't answer at first, worried that Sara would assume the question was for her. Sara, however, was keeping her silence for the same reason. Max then realized how it might be a touchy subject and went quiet.

"Should we tell Will?" El asked, wanting to shift the topic. "I mean, Joyce is his mom."

"I dunno," Sara said. "I don't think it'll be too groundbreaking for him. He likes the chief and he's on board with his mom dating."

"How would you know?" Max asked.

Sara gave Max a confused look, but El was the one to answer. "She was in his head. It would make sense that she'd know." She paused and turned to Sara before asking, "Why did you call him 'the chief'? He's your dad."

Sara's face flushed at this question. "I was trying to be...tactful. I mean, he's your dad too. I don't want you to feel like I'm trying to wedge you out or anything. Besides, this is...a pretty complicated situation. I'd like us all to be able to work it out with as few difficulties as possible."

El swallowed a lump in her throat, surprised at how much better that made her feel. Part of her was sure that Sara would want Hopper for her own that hearing that she was willing to come to a compromise was unexpected in a good way. Maybe Mike was right and this would be like having a sister. A real sister, like him and Nancy. Not like her and Kali. El leaned back, reaching back to put a hand on the blanket behind her to prop her up. "I guess. You've got a better claim as his daughter though." Despite her best efforts, there was a scowl on her face. It was true. Sara was actually his daughter. When it came down to it Sara was his daughter first. El was the imposter.

Max and El were both surprised that Sara laughed at this. "You think I have a better claim than you? God, he's a person, not an inheritance. Besides, he chose you. He's stuck with me because of genetics. I mean, I don't envy him. I'm a pain in the ass."

"No you're not," Max interrupted, rolling her eyes.

"I really am," Sara said. "I'm a total know-it-all."

Before Sara could continue with her list El said, "When you actually do know it all that's not a bad thing."

Sara raised an eyebrow at this. "I really don't know it all. I'm shit at history. I probably would have failed it if Ben hadn't tutored me. It's not a contest, though. Anyway, my point is that I'm obnoxious as fuck. He'd probably spend a week with me and want to ship me off to some orphanage."

"No he wouldn't," El sighed.

"Well...we'll figure it out," Sara said, unsure of what else to say. "I mean, it's tough sometimes, but that's what families do."

"We're family?" El asked.

Sara shrugged at this, "Well, I mean, we do have the same dad. We're something." She still wouldn't let herself use that word.

"Sisters?" El suggested.

The ease which El used the word startled her. "I mean...if you want."

"Just don't end up like Billy and we won't kick your ass," Max said.

Sara raised an eyebrow at this. "Who's Billy?"

"My stepbrother," Max explained. "He tried to beat the shit out of Lucas. He did beat the shit out of Steve."

"I like to do as little shit beating as possible," Sara said. "Plus, if you haven't noticed I'm about five feet tall and I weight about a hundred pounds. I highly doubt I could beat the shit out of Steve."

"But you could use your brain thing," Max said.

"I really don't like doing that," Sara said. "I mean, with animals, it just happens so I can't really help that, but with people, I'd really rather

not. The only reason I did it with Will was to prove that we weren't lying.

"Yeah, that's true, I guess," Max said. "But you still could."

"Yeah, and El could kill all of us with her brain," Sara said. "Just because a person can do something doesn't mean that they will do it."

"I think I'm ready for bed," El said with a sigh. "It's been a long day."

"I second that motion," Sara said, taking another drink and moving under the blankets. El and Max were about to go back to the beds they'd made on the floor when Sara sat up and asked, "Dude...I said that this bed is massive. It's not going to put an orgy spell on us or anything."

"Orgy?" El asked.

"You don't wanna know," Max answered. Still, they went to the massive bed, not wanting to sleep on the floor any more than necessary. The carpet was plush enough, but it was still the floor. It was a bit awkward at first, but it didn't take long for all three girls to fall into a deep and well deserved night's sleep.

#sisters.

39. Plotting

"This is the dumbest shit," Dustin exclaimed as he studied the map of Derry that Ben had left for them before he had to go home. He had to talk to his mom. He didn't want her to worry too much. Steve had driven him, Mike, Stan, and Bill home, not wanting any of the kids out of their own more than necessary. He was back now, though, and in the basement with the remaining kids. Mike (Wheeler) and Richie were already asleep in one of the basement's extra rooms. He had the light on and the door open, but no one judged him for that. None of them really felt safe.

"What're you talking about?" Bev asked. She was the only girl down in the basement. Max and Sara had gone to bed and no one really knew where El was, only that she had stormed off after learning that Sara was her else. They'd been downstairs for everything so they didn't know. They didn't worry though. She was more than capable of taking care of herself.

Dustin gestured at the map. "This is the dumbest shit. You guys said this It thing traveled through the sewers."

Bev nodded, "That's right."

"There's literally nowhere in this town not attached to the sewers!" Dustin exclaimed, gesturing at the map.

And he was right. The sewers were connected to every house, every store, every building. That shouldn't have come to any of them as a surprise though. The sewers ran with the water and water was necessary for life. People needed water to drink, clean, eat. The fact that the monster was so connected to its prey's source of food was both brilliant and horrifying.

Steve decided to point out the obvious and said, "Yeah, well anywhere with water is going to be connected to the sewers."

"So nowhere is safe then?" Dustin exclaimed.

"Dude, calm down," Bev snapped. "Panicking isn't going to help

anyone."

"You should listen to her," Steve said, gesturing in Bev's direction. "She's a smart girl."

Bev flushed a bit at this praise. She was a bit taken with Steve. How could she not be? He was handsome and charming. She wasn't sure what was happening between her and Bill, or her and Ben for that matter. Bill sort of backed away when she moved back into town, like since she was back the fact that he had kissed her should be swept under the rug. To start anew. She could see the appeal in it...hypothetically. She, personally, wanted to face whatever was between them, but Bill didn't seem to be quite ready yet. Ben, sweet Ben, seemed to have gotten wind of what had transpired between her and Bill. Not that she was surprised. Boys talked more than girls ever could, they just didn't realize it. Being his sweet self he had backed off. No more longing looks, no more January Embers. It was unfortunate because with how Bill was being it would have made moving forward with her feelings for one or the other all the easier. But it wasn't easy. Just like the year before, she loved them both and neither of them was making matters simple.

She couldn't deny that Steve giving her attention made her heart flutter. Still, though she was so young, she already knew the difference between love and infatuation. Even so, Bill and Ben were both being distant. Just because she still loved them both that didn't mean that she couldn't develop a crush on Steve. Truth be told...it was hard not to.

"The Quarry's safe," Bev said, tucking a red hair behind her ear. "I mean, as safe as it gets. Just because Pennywise travels through the sewers...that doesn't mean he doesn't leave. Plus there's the mind flayer to worry about."

"Yeah, but Nina...Sara said that the mind flayer was going to be busy trying to find someone else to possess for at least a day or two," Lucas said. "I don't know why it needs to possess someone."

"If it's anything like it is with Sara," Bev began, "she said that going into a new sort of mind takes work so it's harder than it would be with something it's already familiar with."

"It's already possessed Will," Lucas said, concerned that the monster would try and go after him again.

"It wouldn't go after him," Bev responded with a firm shake of her head. "Links Sara makes with people's heads...well, when she did it with us it lasted about a month. It faded so it wasn't so loud as before, but she said she couldn't just sever the ties. Will's still connected with her in the very back of their subconsciouses...I think that's the right way to say it with more than one, isn't it? I don't know, whatever. Anyway, it's not our major concern right now."

"Then what is?" Steve asked. "You were pretty cryptic when you asked us to help you."

That was true. Bev had been vague, mostly because she didn't want anyone finding out that didn't need to. The element of surprise could be vital to her plan. "It's just something the turtle said."

"You guys and that damn turtle again," Lucas said with an exasperated sigh.

Bev narrowed her eyes at this. "If you'd met Maturin then you'd understand."

Wanting to skirt an argument Dustin asked, "Okay, so what did Matrin say?"

"Maturin," Bev corrected him frankly.

"Whatever!" Dustin and Lucas exclaimed together.

Sensing that Bev was growing annoyed Steve asked, "What did Maturin say?"

Bev took a breath, steadying herself before continuing. "He said 'What can be done as a child can never be done again.'"

Steve raised an eyebrow at this. Sure, Dustin and the others were still kids. He couldn't -wouldn't- take that away from them. Not yet. It had been taken away from him, from Nancy, and from Jonathan. After everything with the monsters...once you reached a certain point you weren't a kid anymore and nothing could change that. Dustin still

had the spark of madness that pushed off the shadows of adulthood. So did Mike and Lucas and Will and Max. All of the Derry kids had it too. Even El and Sara, who had seen the worst monsters of all, the human ones, had a dollop of that innocence left. How they still had it, he didn't know, but it was there.

"Okay..." Lucas said, his tone skeptical. "I mean, yeah, I guess, but what does that have to do with this?"

Bev leaned forward, putting herself closer to the boys and crossing her arms over her knees. "You weren't here last time. We were...different then. I mean you don't go through what we went through and don't come out of it messed up, but Pennywise is a part of this issue and we know how to take care of him. We did, anyway. There's something missing." She paused, expecting someone to ask what was missing, but none of them did, expecting that she would have out with it. Rolling her eyes she finished, "Last time we were still kids and still acted like kids. We're growing up, but we can stop it. Or at least slow it down."

"You can't stop growing up," Lucas snapped.

"Not forever," Bev said, a smug smile on her lips. "For a day, though...you can stop it for a day."

"So...what exactly do you need us to help you with?" Dustin asked. "Why not just tell everyone?"

"They have issues of their own. If they knew it wouldn't help them forget," Bev answered.

"So what do we have to do?" Steve asked.

I know I promised Lucas and Max in this chapter, but Max was in the slumber party so...she couldn't be in this one. I'm sure there'll be more LuMax in the future. Just not this chapter. Leave me a review. Any guesses as to what Bev has planned? If so let me know. If you guess right I might tell you. #spoilers.

40. X Marks The Spot

Hopper groaned and glanced up at the clock when he heard someone pounding on his door. It was seven in the morning and he had been up keeping watch at five and three with only an hour of sleep between and now. Despite his, the pounding on the door became louder and more frantic. "Alright, alright," he grumbled, rolling out of his borrowed bed and hobbling to the door, his legs still stiff with sleep. When he opened the door he was surprised to see that Sara was there with an impatient El standing behind her.

He looked at the two girls, surprised at the sight. They were both still in their pajamas and Sara's hair was a rat's nest. El's was a little tidier, but only because it was so much shorter. Still, the look on Sara's face gave him pause. "Sara...what's wrong?"

"They're gone," she stated, her tone rushed and panicked.

"Who's gone?" Hopper asked, still not awake enough for this.

"She won't say," El mumbled, leering at the girl. "She just woke me and Max up and said we had to go because 'they're gone'."

"We tried to stop her," Max said from the other side of the doorframe. Hopper hadn't even noticed her because she was tucked out of sight. "She wouldn't listen to us."

"Who's gone?" Hoppe asked again, hoping he'd have better results than Max and El had had.

"They're GONE!" Sara screamed. Her breathing was short and labored and her eyes were wide. She'd clenched her hands into fists at her side.

Unlike Max and El, Hopper knew what was going on. Sara had been prone to night terrors since she was two. Because of that, she started to have panic attacks. Meds didn't help, but Hopper knew what did. He took her face in his hands and forced her to look at him. "Look at me," he ordered. She shook her head and tried to pull away, but he held fast. "Look. At. Me," he repeated, slower this time. Reluctantly,

she did and he said, "Good...now...breathe." He took a few deep breaths and indicated that she follow his lead. She didn't at first, but after she did she started to calm down, her eyes softening and her breath steadying. When she was breathing normally again he asked, "Now...who's gone?"

"Beverly, Steven, Lucas, Dustin, Eddie, and Will," she said at last. She said the names quickly, but the fact that she was saying them at all was an improvement.

This caught Max's attention. "Why didn't you tell us that?"

Hopper scowled at Max. He'd justed calmed Sara down. He highly doubted that Max making her feel guilty about not having told them more plainly and sooner wasn't going to help anything. "Wake up the other kids. I'll get Joyce and Liz."

The only other kids to wake up were Richie and Mike so El and Max went to do that. Sara said she wanted to look through the house again, just to make sure that she hadn't missed anything. She was still shaken up so no one argued. She hadn't even thought to look in the observation room until she saw Blue whining and sniffing at the door. Sara scratched her dog's head before opening the door and entering.

Needless to say, she hadn't expected to stumble upon what she did.

"Oh my god," she said, making no attempt to be quiet and covering a smile with her hand.

Eddie was the first to wake up, looking up from the comfortable place he'd made for himself nuzzled against Will's chest. "Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed, rolling away from Will so quickly that it jerked Will's arm off him and woke him up.

Both of the boys looked scared and nervous now that they were awake. The shock at her discovery was enough to make Sara forget about Bev and the other boys. At least for a few minutes. "Oh my god," she said again, still covering the smile on her face.

"If you're going to make fun of us just get it over with," Eddie spat, folding his arms over his chest and glaring at the ground, refusing to

look at Will, who was slowly getting up to stand beside Eddie.

Sara dropped her hands and gave them a confused look. "Make fun of you? I think it's great!"

Eddie was genuinely shocked to see that she was grinning. He knew that she knew about him being gay. They'd talked about it and she'd promised to keep it to herself, and it certainly seemed she had done so with both him and with Will. Being okay with it was one thing, but...he didn't expect her to be so happy about it.

"You...think it's great?" Will asked sheepishly.

"Yeah!" Sara exclaimed. "I mean, I knew about Eds, and I knew about you, but I would never have thought...I'm just so happy for you two!" And she was. Unable to stop herself she bounced the distance between her and them and pulled them both into an awkward three-person hug. She pulled away when the boys didn't hug her back and she quickly assured them, "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone...we should probably tell everyone I found you two though. Your mom and brother'll probably flip their shit when they find out you're missing again."

"But...I'm not missing," Will stated plainly. He really didn't want his mom and Jonathan to worry about him again. Not where he had just gotten them off his ass.

"You weren't downstairs so...I assumed the worst," Sara admitted. "I'm sorry. I'll tell your mom I just didn't look well enough. We should get to looking for the others, though."

"Others?" Eddie asked.

"Yeah...you two weren't the only ones not downstairs," Sara said. "Steve, Bev, Lucas, and Dustin are gone."

"What?" the boys exclaimed in unison.

That news shared, Eddie started combing the rest of the house with Sara, just to be safe, while Will rushed downstairs to assure his mom that he was very much alive, he'd just fallen asleep in another part of the house.

They weren't the only ones who reemerged with new information. With most of their party collected in the kitchen, Mike produced a map of Derry that had been left out on the table. It seemed unextraordinary save for one detail. There as a circled X next to the quarry drawn in red ink as opposed to the blue ink that Ben used. "Do you think that's where they are?"

El didn't look convinced, "It's too simple."

"I dunno," Richie said, looking at the X. "If this is Pennywise it's exactly something he'd do. Simple answers. Things only kids would think of. X marks the spot and all that shit."

"There's only one way to find out," Sara said.

"So who goes and who stays behind?" Liz asked. She hadn't wanted to be any part of this. It was pretty obvious that she wanted to stay behind. No one really blamed her.

"Sorry Mrs. Fischer," Eddie said. "I think us splitting up right now...it's a really stupid idea. We're stronger together. If this IS Pennywise the only way we can hurt him is if we do it as a group. No one can stay behind."

Though he was smallest of them all he spoke with such conviction that no one dared to question him on it.

Hopper passed Nancy a shotgun and a few rounds before making sure his own gun was already loaded and ready to go. Jonathan was a shitty shot or else he would have given him a gun too. Instead, the other firearm went to Joyce. They'd gone skeet shooting when they were kids. She had one hell of an aim then. He just hoped she remembered how to shoot. "Let's go," he said, making his way for the door.

*Bev and Steve are NOT dating. She just has a little crush on him. It's one-sided, I promise, but...come on...who wouldn't have a crush on Steve? Also...Weddie *squee* Also, my next chapter is already written and i know at least two of you will shit your pants. In a good way I hope. You've been warned.*

41. The Quarry

"Good boys," Sara crooned as she and the others followed the hellbenders, sniffing at the ground. They knew Bev's scent so she was the one they were hunting down. She assumed that Bev would be with them. Hoped was probably the better word for it. Still, she would move hell and heaven to find them. They'd only been her friends for a year, but it was the best year of her life. Even with everything with the mind flayer and with Pennywise she wouldn't have traded it for anything.

Athos stopped and turned to look at the party behind them. As Eddie had said, it was stupid to split up so they hadn't. Liz looked the most out of place of all of them. She was allergic to nature, being a born and bred New Yorker. Still, she was putting her best foot forward. She certainly seemed out of her element. Everyone else still looked tired, but that was to be expected.

"We're getting close," Hopper said, still looking at the map.

"Yippee for us," Richie said.

"Yeah, we're all thrilled. Could you shut up for once in your life?" Mike replied, growing annoyed with his double. His friends were missing and Richie could do was crack jokes. This was serious. It was no time for messing around and messing around seemed to be all that Richie was capable of.

"Don't get your panties in a twist just because Richie's funnier than you are," Sara said.

Richie turned and gave Mike a smug smile, "Girls like funny guys. That's why Sara's so madly in love with me."

"That sounds about right," Sara replied, smirking when she noticed how that made her dad bristle.

"Mike's funny," El said defensively.

Blue barked, attracting their attention. Before the tiff could further

escalate Sara held up a hand and urged them to be quiet. They didn't heave it at first...but then they did. There was a scream from afar. Their pace had been comfortable at first, but they started to run towards the sound. They ran until they reached the rocky shore of the quarry's beach. When they stopped running, all save for Blue and the hellbenders, none of them had anticipated the sight they saw.

"You fucking assholes!" Eddie shrieked.

"You scared the living shit out of us!" Sara added, just as angry.

"You've got to be kidding me," Liz sighed.

Steve, who was busy grilling hotdogs over one of the Fischer's camping stove, looked up at them when they entered the clearing. He raised an eyebrow at them. They all looked furious and for the life of him Steve couldn't figure out why. "Hey guys..." he greeted them warily. "Anyone want a hot dog?"

"Steve, you scared us half to death!" Nancy screamed at him. "You just bailed on us and now you're asking if we want a fucking hotdog?"

Before Steve could answer another scream rose up from the water as Ben and Bill attacked Bev with a pair of water squirters. "Guys, shut up!" he shouted at them before turning back to Nancy and the others. "We didn't bail on you. Dustin left a note with the map, and if you have the map you should have the note...isn't that how you got here?"

"We got here because we tracked your asses down," Sara declared angrily. She liked Steve a lot and would have hated it if he'd died. She was happy he wasn't dead, but also angry that they'd worried them so badly.

Steve turned his hotdogs over before asking, "You guys didn't get the note?"

"No!" they all shouted at him in unison.

Rolling his eyes, he released an annoyed groan before shouting, "DUSTIN!"

Dustin, like the other kids, was in the water. He jumped when Steve yelled at him and, reluctantly, he swam back up to the shore and climbed out to rush up to them. "Yeah?" he asked nervously when he saw the others nervously.

Steve crossed his arms over his chest and fixed Dustin with a scowl before asking, "What happened to that note that you were supposed to leave on the map?"

"I left it on the map," Dustin insisted plainly.

"There was no note on the map!" Mike shouted at Dustin. Like Sara, he was relieved that his friends were alive and well, but he was annoyed that they'd been left in the dark and worried out of their skins.

"But...I left it," Dustin insisted weakly.

"That's beside the point," Hopper interjected. "What the hell is going on?"

"It's a barbeque," Bev said, rushing up from the water to greet them.

Sara raised an eyebrow at Bev's appearance. "That's...that's my swimming suite," she said.

Bev scoffed and rolled her eyes, "It's not like you don't have eighteen more. Relax, I brought one for you, Max, and El too. And one for Nancy, but I don't know if they'll be big enough for her."

"Are they all bikinis?" Max said, uncomfortably looking the other girl up and down.

"Yes," Sara answered, a defensive hint in her voice. "I'm short. It's hard to find one pieces that'll fit me right. They all...bunch up."

"You kids planned a barbeque?" Joyce asked, suddenly feeling silly for having a gun on her.

"Well, Bev did," Steve said, gesturing to Bev with the tongs he was using to flip sausages. "She sort of recruited us to help."

"Why?" Nancy asked, raising an eyebrow. "We're in the middle of a fight with monsters and you decide to have some...lake side cookout?"

"We can't take this too seriously," Bev said. "If we do...we'll all lose our damn minds. Sara said that the mind flayer was going to be busy for at least a day or two and It never comes to the quarry. It's too far away from the sewers. We need a break."

They considered her words for a moment, but not much longer. She was right.

One of Sara's suites fit Nancy, but it was a snug fit. Steve offered to watch the kids while the adults went back to get swimming clothes of their own, but they all declined, none of them much in the mood for swimming. Jonathan was offered a pair of trunks from Bill, who had supplied the trunks meant for Richie and Mike, but he, like Steve, wasn't in the mood for swimming. Instead, he opted to take pictures of everyone.

When they were all in the water they decided to have a chicken fighting tournament. Will and Eddie were shy about choosing each other as partners, but after Sara assigned them as partners they didn't complain. Dustin asked to be Sara's partner and she agreed, but not before asking if he was sure if he was physically strong enough to hold her on his shoulders. Max went with Lucas, Mike (W.) with El, Stan with Mike (H.), Ben with Richie, and Bill with Beverly. They were all happy with their partners (except for Richie, who would have rather seen Sara partner with just about anyone else).

They were two rounds in when Steve barked at them to get out of the water and eat. At that point Stan had been knocked off Mike's shoulders, leaving Bill and Bev victorious. Everyone was surprised that Will and Eddie had managed to bring Max off of Lucas's shoulders, resulting in the excited, shrill cheers of Sara. No one else knew why she was rooting for them more than Bev and Bill, but they didn't suspect the real reasons. Eddie and Will knew, though, and it was hard for them to not blush.

As they ate they talked and laughed and joked. Bev had been right. They needed a day to just relax and be...normal. They discussed what

they were going to tell their parents when they missed school the next day, surprised that it hadn't crossed any of their minds before then. Eventually, they decided to cross that bridge when they came to it.

After they'd waited half an hour after eating (something Joyce reminded them of angrily when Richie tried to run back into the water) they resumed the competition. The contest was brutal and by the time they got down to the last two contestants, Richie and Ben vs. Sara and Dustin, things were getting heated. Mike(W.), El, Max, Lucas, and Will were all rooting for Sara and Dustin, wanting at least ONE person from their town to win, and it was the same with the Loser's Club and Ben and Richie.

"Ready to go down, blonde?" Richie taunted from atop Ben's shoulders.

With a smirk, Sara took his hands and said, "You wish, Radar."

Richie laughed and waited for his would-be twin to give the signal and they were off. Sara was a lot stronger than he expected and he almost knocked her over, resulting in her unleashing a string of scream-giggles that made his gut flutter. She was blurry through the drops of water on his glasses, but he could still see her. For a second he heard Steve in his head informing him that he was as subtle as a brick. Another voice, probably one of his own, told him that there was no glory without guts. That was the moment he had decided he had completely lost his mind.

He freed one of his hands and used it to hook his fingers behind her neck. He pulled her forward, shut his eyes, and kissed her.

The cheering stopped with an unnerving suddenness and Bev gasped, clapping her hands around her mouth.

For a second, Sara was too stunned to say or do anything, she might have even kissed him back for a bit, but then she planted her free hand on Richie's chest and used it to shove him off Ben's shoulders and into the water, where he landed with a resounding crash.

"What happened?" Joyce asked, distracted from her conversation with

Hopper, Liz, Nancy, and Steve by the silence.

Jonathan, who had seen the whole thing, and possibly caught it on camera, pulled his camera away and stared at the kids, just as stunned as they had been. Not that he cared. If the kids were into each other then that wasn't any of his business, but it had just been so...unexpected.

"Um...Sara won the chicken fight," he said awkwardly, not sure if he wanted to out the girl to her parents.

Hopper scoffed and turned back to their discussion saying, "That's my girl."

From the shore, he couldn't hear the conversation, but he gathered that Sara wanted to have a discussion with Richie. A private discussion. He tried to shrug it off, but she was adamant, giving him a scowl that made even Jonathan nervous. Blue had been asleep on a blanket next to Hopper and Jonathan called to her. She did so, but slowly. She was a smart dog. About as smart as any person he'd met and he didn't want Sara and Richie getting into trouble so he asked her to keep an eye on them. She snorted, but trotted off after them, leaving him shaking his head and watching where they had gone.

The remaining kids had started to play a game of Marco Polo, probably wanting to distract themselves from what had just happened. He didn't blame them. He wished it could always be so easy to avoid awkwardness. Taking a breath, he took up his camera again, watching and waiting for good shots.

Behold! A Sichie kiss! To some of you, I am sorry. To others...you're welcome. The plot is due to thicken (at last, damn what a slow burn) in not the next chapter, but the one after. Have any of you read The Dark Tower series? I'm not talking about the movie. The movie is lacking. I know this story is hella long, but we're getting close to the end. Like...maybe 10-15 chapters? I'm bad at estimating shit though so...who the hell knows. Anyway...bye!

42. I See A Red Door

"Damn, Blondie, no need to cause a scene," Richie said as he and Sara moved off to somewhere where no one could see or hear them. Face fixed in a scowl, Sara wheeled around on him and demanded, "Me cause a scene?" She was furious! She could have killed him.

Richie shrugged and leaned against a rock, slipping his thumbs into his waistband. "You kind of did," he commented.

"You!" she paused to lower her voice and raised a finger to him, pointing it at him as she advanced on him. "You can't just...do that. And in front of everyone! I'm sure it's no big deal for you."

"No big deal?" Richie scoffed, grabbing her wrist and moving her finger out of his face. "Damn, if I thought that you'd hate me kissing you so much I would have done it sooner."

"This isn't a joke, Richie," she snapped. "You can't just...mess with me like that."

"Mess with you?" Richie repeated.

"Saying shit is different than actually doing shit," she countered. "Did you take my feelings into account when you fucking...did that?"

Richie couldn't quite wrap his head around what was happening. He knew she was mad at him, but any idiot could see that. Why she was angry was becoming increasingly unclear. "I did a lot, actually...I don't get it. Why are you so mad? I mean, I thought I knew, but now I'm just confused as shit."

"You can't just kiss people and assume it doesn't mean anything to them," she snapped.

There was a clacking of rocks as something approached. Startled, they both jumped, Richie wrapping Sara tightly in his arms and Sara not complaining in the slightest. They were both surprised and amused at what had scared them so.

"Blue!" Sara exclaimed, both annoyed and amused.

Richie laughed, burying his face into Sara's wet hair to try and stop the onslaught of mirth. Blue barked at them and bolted up to them and started licking Sara's leg, resulting in a gale of giggles. The dog didn't stop until Sara scratched behind the dog's ear. "What do you mean Jonathan asked you to keep an eye on us?" she asked.

Blue barked her reply and Sara's face flushed, suddenly aware that Richie was still holding her. "Jesus, Blue, just...no."

Richie, knowing that Sara could hear things from the dog that he never could. "What?"

"Nothing," she insisted. She tried to move away from him, but he held to her. She met his eye and scowled at him. "Let me go, Richie," she ordered.

"No, senorita," Richie said, adopting his Mexican accent. "Not until you tell me why you're mad."

She tried to fix him with a stern look, but that was easier said than done. "You think you're funny, don't you?"

With a shrug, Richie answered, "I know I am. Now...why're you mad?"

"Because you kissed me!" she exclaimed, trying to keep her voice down.

"And...you think I just did it for a laugh," he finished for her.

She pursed her lips and looked away before saying, "You don't have to rub it in."

"I didn't do it because I thought it would be funny!" Richie insisted. "I did it because I've wanted to do it all fucking year!"

Sara looked up at him, meeting his eye warily. "You did?"

He nodded and gave her a small, fleeting smile.

To his horror and surprise, she buried her face into his chest and started crying. Unsure of what to do or say he simply said, "What the

fuck?"

"The timing...it's awful," she said, sniffing and trying to get a hold of herself.

He frowned and wrapped an arm around her, pulling her into him. She was right. Liz probably wouldn't want to stay in Derry. Not after what had happened to her husband. And especially not now that they knew who Sara's dad was. Liz would want the cop to be in Sara's life. None of them mentioned it, but they all knew...Sara wouldn't be staying in Derry. "I know...it might be the only time we have though."

Taking a deep breath Sara said, "You should have done it sooner...it's not like you didn't have any chances."

"Thanks for making me feel better, Neens," he joked.

She pulled away from him and made a face at him, "Making you feel good isn't my job."

"Would you like for it to be?" he asked, playfully wiggling his eyebrows at her. She laughed, which was all he had wanted. It gave him enough courage to kiss her again.

This time she didn't push him away. For a few minutes, they were just a pair of inexperience and overly eager teenagers. They didn't get very far, but they didn't need to. They might have if Blue hadn't demanded Sara's attention.

"Tell her to be quiet," Richie said, pulling her face back to his and moving in to give her another kiss.

She put her hand up between them so that his lips met her palm. He looked disappointed, but he didn't press her. Instead, he heaved a sigh and said, "What does she want?"

"She says she found something weird," Sara answered.

"Weird how?" Richie couldn't believe that he could still be making out with the girl of his dreams if the dog hadn't decided to cock block him over 'something weird'.

"One way to find out," she sighed before offering her hand to him. He smiled a bit before taking it. Sure, it wasn't as good as kissing her, but he wasn't complaining.

Blue's discovery was closer than either of them had expected, just around the corner of a boulder that they had been necking by. Blue was right about one thing...it was certainly strange.

"It's...a door," Richie said, unable to keep his befuddlement out of his voice.

And it was. A simple, red painted door with a brass handle. Thought it was unsupported, it stood up straight, ready to be opened. Richie and Sara exchanged confused glances before moving forward to investigate. They let each other's hands go and went to examine it. Sara knelt in front of it, nudging it with her fingers to see if it would fall over, but it didn't. It stood as firmly as if it was fastened to a frame a locked shut.

Richie went to examine what might be on the other side of it. He wouldn't have seen the oddity if he had blinked in that moment. His eyes widened and he began to investigate further. He rocked forward on his feet, just a bit, then back to his original spot. Then he leaned back. Then he repeated. To him, what he was doing made perfect sense. To Sara...it looked like he was trying (and horribly failing) to do a salsa step. She had been about to tell him something she'd found, but then she noticed what he was doing and she stopped before the words could get out of her mouth.

She watched for another few seconds before asking, "What the hell are you doing?"

Richie stopped on a backstep and looked at her. "Come here and look at this."

Rolling her eyes, she got up and complied. He took her shoulders and told her, "Stand here and lean forward very slowly. And keep an eye on the door."

"I'd ask why, but I don't think you'll tell me," she said with a sigh. She did what he said and paused, staring at the door with a slack jaw.

"It's...it's just gone!" she exclaimed.

Richie nodded, "Yeah, it's just gone. That's fucking weird, right?"

She nodded and leaned back against him, mostly because this door was starting to scare her. She'd feel better if she could see it. "I found something weird too," she admitted.

He gave her shoulder a small kiss, amazed at how awkward it didn't feel. "Lead the way, dear lady," he declared, speaking in his British accent.

She led him back to the front of the door and pointed at an etching he hadn't noticed at first. He read aloud, "'The Lucky Seven'...what the hell does that mean?"

"I have no idea," she admitted. "That's not it though."

She pressed her ear against the door and he did the same. They were facing each other so he moved in to give her another kiss, but she stopped him with a scowl. It took a few minutes to put together just what he was hearing. "There's...voices," he said, unable to keep the awe off his face.

Sara nodded, "Yeah. This is...seriously messed up."

Richie heaved an annoyed sigh, "We have to go tell everyone about this thing now, don't we?"

"Obviously," Sara scoffed.

"And we were having such a good time," he groaned.

Sara gave him a playful smirk and said, "Maybe you were."

He stuck his tongue out at her and they got back up to rejoin the party and the losers. They didn't get far before Stan came running up to them. Sara and Richie dropped each other's hands simultaneously. It seemed that neither of them was quite ready to expose what had happened to their friends. Still...something wasn't right.

"What's got your panties in a twist Uris?" Richie asked, trying to hide

how embarrassed he was that he and Sara had been stumbled upon.

Panting from his run he answered, "You guys have to come. You can fight later."

"We're not," Sara began before pausing, a blush coming to her cheeks. She glanced at Richie, who was blushing too before she finished, "We just came to a peace."

"For now," Richie added. "I mean, I'm sure there'll be more...fighting...in our future."

Stan rolled his eyes as Sara attempted to discreetly elbow Richie's ribs. "No one cares if you're fighting or fucking, just get back to the picnic."

"We found something really messed up though, Stan," Sara tried to argue.

"Then we'll look at your messed up thing later," Stan insisted. "You're going to want to see this...especially you, Sara."

The way he said that made her eyes go wide. "Why especially me?"

Stan didn't answer. His eyes said it all, though. Answering would hurt both him and her. It was better if she just went to see what had happened. Blue whined, sensing Sara's discomfort. Sara made no sign that she noticed. Instead, she pushed past Stan and ran back to their picnic area, hoping for the best...but expecting the worst.

Shit's gonna get real next chapter. Also, I had a reason for asking if you guys had read The Dark Tower series. If you haven't...some of what's coming up might not make sense, but if you have you'll definitely recognize some references and shit. Anyway, leave me a review or something maybe, I dunno. Hope you guys had a good weekend! I have to go watch football now. I hate sports.

43. And I Want To Paint It Black

El watched with bated breath as her sister took their father's hands in her own and pressed her brow against his. She couldn't see what Sara was doing, or what she was trying to do, but she could see the strain it was putting on the girl. She was shaking, and her nose had already begun to bleed. Despite that, she didn't pull away. Whatever she was trying, she hadn't given up.

Not wanting to watch Sara and their father anymore she looked back to Joyce, Liz, and Nancy, still frozen in their conversation, laughing in some silent and frozen joke. It was the same with Jonathan, Steve, and Hopper. They didn't speak, they didn't breathe. They were as stone

El had tried moving them with her abilities, but that wasn't it. Something bigger was at work here. She wanted to cry, but she didn't. She wouldn't let herself. Still, at least she had Mike. She held his hand tightly and took slow, steady breaths. She had to keep her composure. She hated it, but she had to.

Finally, Sara pulled away from her father and wiped the blood from her nose. Richie offered her a napkin, but it was too late. She was still bloody. El knew how that could be.

"Well?" El asked, eager for an explanation.

Sara shook her head. "I don't know. It's like...they're all still in there, but it's all...frozen."

"So, you can't fix it?" Lucas asked.

She fixed him with an annoyed glare and said, "This isn't exactly something I know how to do. I'm a little in over my head. Getting in their heads is no issue, but it's like a record skipping in there. It's just repeating the last word they were thinking over and over. I mean, I'm assuming it's the same with the others, but it hurt getting in there and it hurt getting out. I'm not doing it again if I can help it."

"That's it?" Dustin asked. "You won't even try?"

"Fuck off, she doesn't need to," Richie said defensively. "She said it hurt. Wearing her out shouldn't be your first priority."

"Who the hell asked you, asshole?" Dustin shot back.

"Who the hell asked you, fuck face?" Richie returned, moving towards Dustin, his hands clenched into fists.

"Please don't," Sara asked quietly, rubbing her temples.

If Dustin or Richie heard her they made no sign of it. They advanced on each other, neither striking blows. Not yet. Their words became a tangled mess of vocal vomit reeking with anger. Sara wasn't the only one trying to tell them to shut up. Everyone else rang in, some addressing Richie, others addressing Dustin, some addressing both. They didn't listen though. It was hard to make anything out in the cacophony.

Everyone jumped back, surprised when both boys shot up about two feet in the air and then flew back so that they were about ten feet from each other.

When everyone had shut up El wiped off her nose and glared up at her captives. "Sara asked you to stop."

"Seriously," Stan added. "I mean, it's not a dick measuring contest. There's more important shit to deal with right now than you two and your egos."

Dustin glared at Richie and Richie glared right back, neither of them wanting to submit first.

"You guys don't have to be friends, but you do need to get your priorities in place," Mike (W) growled.

"Mike's r-r-right," Bill said. "We've got b-bigger problems right now."

Max glanced at El and said, "El, I think you can put them down."

"Not until they agree to stop being fucking stupid," Sara grumbled.

El smirked at her new sister and said, "My thoughts exactly."

Richie was the first to submit. Though, what did he have to lose? He didn't have any reason to be bitter. "Fine, I won't poke the curly bear. Now put me down. This is awkward as hell."

Not sure if Richie would keep his word, El glanced at the loser's club. Sara, Eddie, and Bev all nodded her. It was good enough for her since it seemed they were the ones who knew him best.

Dustin crossed his arms and simply said, "Fine."

"Good," Stan said, now that everyone had cooled down. "Now, since we're all done yelling, Sara, is it possible that whatever you and Richie found has something to do with this?"

Sara shrugged, "I don't know. I mean, maybe. What we found was weird, but...this isn't good."

"No shit, Sherlock," Eddie scoffed.

Rolling her eyes Sara shot back, "Fuck off Watson."

"Well there's only one way to find out," Ben said, trying to sound amicable after what had transpired between Richie and Dustin. The tension was still there but no one was stupid enough to address it. It was an elephant in the room that would remain ignored for as long as possible. "Let's go see what you guys found."

"If it's even still there," Richie muttered.

They all changed out of their swimming suites and back into their ordinary clothes before they started back for the door. Blue led the way, tail held high and wagging as she went. When they arrived, everyone was just as confused by it as Richie and Sara had been.

"It's just a door," Dustin said, still cross from the spat before. "I mean, it's weird, but not exactly our grade of weird."

"There are voices on the other side of it," Sara said, fixing him with a look. A look that dared him to challenge her on the oddity of the red door.

"I see a red door and I want it painted black," Will sang to himself as

he approached the door, the first of the group to do so.

"At least someone has good taste in music," Richie said as he watched Will study the door.

Will held his ear against the door for a moment before jolting back away from it, shocked. "Sara's right. There's voices on the other side of it."

Richie and Sara stood back and let the others administer the same examinations that they had already given it. When they were all done Mike (H) asked, "What does The Lucky Seven mean?"

In unison, Sara and Richie shrugged. Richie said, "No fucking idea."

"It... might be us," Mike (W) said thoughtfully.

Stan raised an eyebrow at him and said, "How can it be us? There's fourteen of us."

"Exactly," Mike said. "Seven from Hawkins and seven from Derry."

"Your math is off," Richie interrupted. "There's six from Hawkins and eight from Derry."

Sara realized that she was what put the numbers off and said, "No. No, Mike's right. I'm originally from Hawkins. Seven from Derry, seven from Hawkins."

"But if that's what it means-" Max began.

"Which kids are the lucky seven?" Lucas finished for her.

"If you ask me we all have pretty shitty luck," Dustin said, rubbing his chin as he considered the riddle before them. He was usually pretty good at riddles, but this one made no sense to him. There wasn't enough information. And even if there was...did they want to see what was behind that door? He wasn't sure if he did.

"I hear that," Bev scoffed, folding her arms to think over the puzzle as well.

"Did you try to open it?" El asked, running her fingers over the letter K in the word lucky.

At the same time Richie and Sara answered. He said no. She said yes. Richie looked at Sara, stunned by this. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She shrugged, "I don't know. I didn't think it was a big deal. It was locked anyway."

"Maybe that's for the best," Dustin said.

El, however, wasn't convinced. This door was meant for them. She was sure of it. "I don't think so," she said, staring at the gleaming brass handle.

Mike (W) saw what she was thinking and tried to tell her not to try and open the door, but it was too late. The handle turned, and the door opened away from them.

No one saw what was behind the door, save for a blinding white light that flashed as a gust of wind shot out of the door, knocking over anyone standing too close, which just happened to include all of them. The wind stopped as soon as it had picked up and the door slammed shut before falling towards them and shattering on the stone scant inches from Mike, its remains glossy black rather than barn red.

They sat up, breathless confused and stunned, and all learned that where once there had been fourteen now there were seven.

Darling you've got to let me know...who did stay and who did go...if they go it will be troubllllle...for those who stay it will be double...but I won't yet let you know...who did stay and who did go...I'm sorry. Only I'm not. That's...it for now.

44. Those Left Behind

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45. Friends On The Other Side

The first thing El was aware of when she woke up was sand underneath her skin. The second thing was the dog licking at her ear frantically. After that it was the brutal sun above her. Granted, it had been warm, but not as dry and brittle as this heat.

When she forced her eyes open she was surprised to see that the thing licking her wasn't a dog at all. She had been assuming that it was Blue licking her, but she didn't open her eyes to a huskey. Instead it was a new, strange looking creature with golden eyes and black and gray striped fur. It looked like a crossbreed of a dog and a badger with a long, serpentine tail. When it saw her eyes were opened it cocked its head at her and said, "Oy?"

Needless to say, she hadn't been expecting it to say a word to her. She wasn't easily startled, but this was a new experience. She knew she was startled, but she didn't realize how shaken the beast had made her until she realized that they new sound was a scream. A scream that was coming from her mouth.

The animal stumbled back, looking befuddled and saying, "Oy oy oy?"

She raised her hand to throw the new monster away from her with her mind, but before she could a boy knelt down next to the animal and wrapped an arm around him. "It's okay Oy," the boy said as he scratched the animal behind its ear just like a boy with his dog. Only that wasn't a dog. "You just scared her."

"Oy," the animal said in return before standing up and trotting away from the boy, its tail held aloft like a prissy cat.

The boy shook his head at the animal and looked back at El before saying, "It's okay. Oy's a good one. He won't hurt you."

"What...is it?" she asked, too stunned to say anything else.

The boy looked confused for a moment before asking, "Oy? He's a billybumbler. I'm assuming you and your friends aren't from around

here."

El's eyes shot open wide and she exclaimed, "My friends!" She tried to get onto her feet, but she winced and gripped her stomach. Whatever going through that door had done to her was far from pleasant.

"Easy!" the boy said as he rushed to her side and forced her to lay back down. "Roland thinks that you and your friends were brought here through a door and he doesn't know if you were ready for it. You need to get your strength back."

"Roland?" El asked.

The boy gave her a small smile and said, "He's one of my friends. He's looking for the rest of your friends. There was a dog who came with you that's been tracking them down and leading him and Eddie to them."

El gave the boy another confused look, "Eddie's here? Skinny boy, kind of short."

The boy frowned at this, "Well there's a couple of boys here. You're the first one who woke up, though. I'm talking about my friend Eddie. He's an adult though. His wife is here, though, if you want to talk to her."

El considered it for a few seconds before nodding. She always found women to be more comforting. She was sure this boy was doing his best, but he just wasn't cutting it.

The boy smiled and offered her his hand, "Alright, I'll take you to Susanna. She's great. You'll love her. I'm Jake, by the way."

El took his hand and before she let him help her up, "I'm Jane. My friends call me El, though."

"Nice to meet you, El," Jake said with a smile.

El scowled a bit at this. She had said that her friends called her El. She never said that they were friends. Still, he was trying to help her. It was better to give him the benefit of the doubt. At least for the time being.

He led her to a clearing about thirty feet away where a woman was sitting in a chair next to a fire making some stew. No...not just a chair...a wheelchair. This made El a bit wary at first, but she started to panic a bit when she noticed that the woman didn't just have broken or useless legs. Her legs were missing from the knee down. El hadn't had a lot of experience with people who were broken.

Still, despite the woman having missing limbs she carried herself with elegance, poise, and even strenght. El wasn't sure if she would be able to carry herself in that kind of way without her legs to take her there.

When the woman saw her she gave El a dazzling smile that was nearly blinding against the dark chocolate color of her skin. "Nice to see you're awake, sugar. You're the first of your friends. We've found six of ya, including you. We're thinking that might be it." The way the woman spoke was like a rich woman from the south. What was the name of the type of woman El was thinking of? Debutante. The way the woman spoke made her think of a debutante.

El shook her head, "No. There's one more. There has to be one more. The door said-" She stopped herself, not wanting to give anything away.

Susanna stopped stirring the pot midmotion and she and Jake looked at each other, wordlessly conversing with each other about how Roland had been right. They were from another world.

"What did the door say, sugar?" Susanna asked. "Eddie's was The Prisoner. Mine was The Lady of Shadows. I happen to think mine had the best name. What was yours?"

El hesitated a moment before admitting, "The Lucky Seven...I don't think we were that lucky though. I'm just glad we aren't in the Upside Down so...maybe we are lucky."

"Upside down?" Jake asked.

Shaking her head El said, "Bad place."

"Where're you from?" Susanna asked.

"Hawkins. Indiana," El answered. "We found the door in Derry, Maine

though."

Susanna and Jake both looked at each other, silently telling each other that they thought that was strange. They were no strangers to leaving one world and coming to the one they were in. However, they had gotten so used to all of their companions being from New York City that they were certain that these new people would be from there as well. They hadn't been expecting it, but they supposed it wasn't unheard of. After all, stranger things had happened.

"We're from New York so we get how confusing it must be to be here," Susanna told El reassuringly.

El knew that they were trying to be comforting, but she wasn't in the mood for it. She needed some time to process everything that had happened. Plus, she wanted to see who else was here. She needed some time. "Can I see my friends?"

"Of course, sugar," Susanna said, returning to her work with the soup. "Jake, go ahead and take her to her friends. We'll talk again when you're ready."

El smiled at Susanna and thanked her before letting Jake take her to her friends. She was glad to see so many familiar faces, but her heart dropped when she realized that one face she wanted more than anything wasn't there. Mike wasn't there. He was either back in Derry or he was the one of them who was missing.

Not wanting to think about it anymore she laid in a place on the ground next to Bev and Max and shut her eyes, hoping to process what had happened. Instead, she fell back asleep. That was fine, though. She needed a break from her current reality. Dreams were the best place to get that.

Surprise bitch. Bet you thought you saw the last of me.

46. Behold The Turtle Of Enormous Girth

When El woke she was groggy and her eyes were fuzzy. You can imagine her embarrassment (and disappointment) when she realized that the person who had woken her up was wasn't Mike. It wouldn't have been so bad if she hadn't shouted Mike's name and thrown herself into his arms.

Richie tried to be a good sport about it, but he was obviously just as uncomfortable as she had been. After he told her, "Nope, not Mike...sorry," he gently pushed her away and told her that he was waking her up because she was the only one still asleep and dinner was ready.

Everyone else seemed as confused by their new environment as El had been. Max and Bev had huddled together, sitting at the base of Susannah's wheelchair, sipping at their soup. Jake was having a conversation with Eddie, Stan, and Ben, eagerly asking them questions about what he had missed back in their world.

There were two new men in the group, one of which El assumed was Susannah's husband. They, frankly, couldn't have been more different. One was terrifying. Not in the way that papa had been terrifying. He was terrifying in a silent, suggestive way. He had done her no wrong, and she doubted she'd done anything to her friends. Still, there was a subtle power to him. Something he alluded that made it seem that he could do just about anything. She could imagine him surrounded by hundreds of bad men with only the gun he had on his hip and still come out on top. Then again, maybe it would be the good men surrounding him. He didn't seem like a bad man. Stoic and quiet, perhaps, but not bad. She couldn't fault him for having characteristics that she too possessed.

The other man could have been a twin of Richie's. Not in face, but in character. His nose was smaller, his eyes were blue, and he was covered in freckles. The corners of his mouth had a bit of an upturn to them, like he could live, breathe, cry, and die all with a smile on his face. He was trying to tell jokes to Max and Bev to make them less uneasy. He tried his damnest, but the girls weren't in the mood for jokes. Richie, however, cracked up when the joker delivered the

punchline to his joke.

Once everyone had welcomed Richie and El back into the group Jake made it a point of introducing El to the two men. The joker was Eddie (because, clearly, between Mike, Mike, Will, and Bill, plus Mike and Richie being mirror images of each other, all they needed was someone else with the same name as someone in their group to confuse the hell out of them all). He was Susannah's husband and, frankly, El couldn't understand what she saw in the guy. Sure, he was good looking enough, but it would have been exhausting being married to someone that saw everything as a joke.

The serious one was Roland. Unlike Eddie, who had greeted her with zeal and mirth, Roland simply gave her a curt nod.

El was surprised when Blue jumped up from her examinations of Oy and dashed over to her. Blue whined and rubbed her head against El's leg until she petted her. When she sat next to Max Blue laid down next to El and laid her head upon her lap. Though she was touched by this, she was primarily surprised.

Susannah gave El a bowl of stew and a friendly smile. Though the conversation seemed merry and light due to Richie and the adult Eddie's banter, there was a tenseness among them. El could tell she wasn't the only one who felt it due to the glances she shared with Bev and Max and the glances she saw Jake and adult Eddie share with Roland and Susannah. There was a big old penny in the air, hovering over their heads like a dark cloud. It was only a matter of time before it dropped.

And drop it did.

The shift in conversation came when Roland finally spoke for the first time.

"Why do you kids think you came to be here?" he asked, handing his dish off to Oy, who buried his long nose inside it and began to lap at the leftovers.

"Well...we came through a door," Ben said nervously, wringing his hands together as he answered.

Roland shook his head and said, "I asked why, not how."

"Give 'em a break, Roland," adult Eddie said, his voice thick with a New York accent. "They're a bunch of kids."

"We've gotten past the point of needing a break," Stan said. "What we all need is therapy."

Eddie, Max, Richie, and Bev jumped into the conversation, some more wary than others. The only one who kept their silence was El. She was the only one who saw Roland's question as something that seriously ought to have been considered. She was so used to things just happening that it rarely occurred to her that there might be some reason behind it all.

She started to pay attention to the discussion again when Bev said, "I feel like I've been here. Not...actually here, but something like it. It feels like there...a magnet in the air."

"And it's trying to pull us somewhere," non-adult Eddie finished.

Max, Richie, and Ben all agreed with this feeling, but it seemed that El and Stan couldn't feel it. However, when Roland pointed a finger up to the sky it couldn't be denied that she could see it. The sky was a dusky orange, ready to go dark with the night and full of tumbling, fluffly clouds. El wished that Dustin was here. He knew all about clouds and science. He could tell her what kind of clouds they were. However, El doubted that he could explain why there was a beam of blank sky trailing through the sky, the clouds seeming to move away rather than touch it.

El wasn't the only one awed by the sight. Clouds didn't form perfectly straight lines. Something about it was wrong.

"What the hell is that?" Max asked, not wanting to take her eyes away from the sky.

"Some freaky shit, that's what," Richie answered, also craning his neck to better see the oddity.

"It's the path of the beam," Roland answered. "The road my Ka Tet and I must follow."

"Ka what?" Eddie, the younger, asked.

"I've heard that before," Bev exclaimed, shouting so loudly that she startled both Blue and Oy out of their near-sleep states. "Ka Tet down the path of the beam. You're going to the Dark Tower, aren't you? You're the gunslingers that Maturin told Sara about!"

It was Roland's turn to look shocked, a feat that El thought him incapable of up to now. However, he didn't deny it so that led El to believe that Bev was right. These were the gunslinger and, for some reason or another, they were reading for some Dark Tower. Rather than demand to know how Bev had come to know so much of him, or who Sara was and why she knew Roland asked, "Who's Maturin?"

"Maturin is...well he's..." Bev stopped, her face turning as red as her hair before saying, "You wouldn't believe it."

"He's a giant turtle," El said, less afraid of how these new strangers would preceive her than Bev would.

Eddie, the elder, choked on the water he had been drinking and Jake pounded him hard on the back until he stopped sputtering. Susannah tried to be subtle, but she put a hand on her chest and her face did little to hide how nervous she was.

"And this...this Sara girl...she's spoken to the turtle?" Roland asked. "He's...he's really real?"

"I've spoken to him," El said matter-of-factly. "He is...unusual."

"Ain't we all?" Richie added with a cheeky grin that no one appreciated, save for Eddie the elder.

Roland shook his head, ignoring the question before looking El in the eye and asking, "You say you've met him. And he's intelligent?" El nodded and Roland pressed, "And he showed you the Tower?"

El shook her head, "He showed Sara the tower. She's my sister. I haven't even heard of it."

Roland heaved a disappointed sigh and shook his head, "I would have liked to know more about him. There's so many questions he could

answer. Like why you're here and where we're to go. Sadly, though, meeting guardians like him don't happen often."

El considered her next words long and carefully. Roland was right. Maturin would, or at least could, have answers as to why she and her friends were here. He could help them get home. He could get them as far from this tower and beam as he could. Whatever the Tower was, El had no interest or hope of seeing it. On the other hand, the dead lights were in the inbetween. Going there was a risk, but living here amid the chaos with the gunslingers. Finally, she tucked a hair behind her ear, looked Roland dead in the eye and told him, "I can find Maturin...I can talk to him."

Hey guys. So some of you are a bit confused as to why Roland, Eddie, Susannah, and Jake are suddenly in this story. These guys are from The Dark Tower series, another one of Stephen King's works. The books, not the movie. The books are amazing and the movie was...less than amazing. I know it seems random, but The Dark Tower has a link to It (kind of like 80% of Stephen King's books have a connection to It) and I love these guys. They're probably going to be in maybe one or two more chapters. They're mostly there because of Maturin (spoiler alert). It'll all come together in the end (if I ever get there). Anyway, don't forget to leave a review or something. Bye guys!

47. Down The Rabbit Hole And Back Again

"Are you sure that's where It lives?" Mike (W.) asked, staring down the tunnel that was putting grey water out into the barrens. There were dozens, maybe over a hundred of these outlets running into and out of the sewers. It was where the Loser's Club congregated and the more he paid attention to it, the more Mike thought that the barrens must have been like It's background.

"I-I'm sure," Bill said, adjusting the strap on his backpack and looking down into the darkness.

"That's fine," Dustin sighed. "Just the thousandth time I've had to go head to head against a monster from another world. It'll be just like summer camp."

"Let me know what summer camp you go to because it sounds like shit and I'd like to avoid it at all costs if you don't mind," Mike (H.) said, getting a laugh from a few of his companions.

Shifting uncomfortably, Will asked, "So what now? We just walk into the monster's lair with our lame ass level one weapons?"

"That's the idea, I guess," Lucas said, heaving an exasperated sigh.

"Then why are we still waiting?" Will asked. "If we're going to die, I'd rather get it over with."

"We'll die soon enough," Bill said, turning away from the opening to the sewer and looking where Sara sat on the bank of the waters, her eyes covered with Lucas's bandana. "Let her finish. I want to d-do as little dying as possible."

"And you seriously think that Physic Psycho can make a difference?" Lucas asked, turning to look at the girl who might be their only hope.

"It can't hurt to try," Mike (W.) said, trying to sound optimistic, but unable to keep a note of hopelessness out of his voice.

Behold, my flowers, I have returned in time to get spooky. Sorry about the wait. I know if I'm not feeling a writing project I'm just going to write

garbage so I'd rather take a break and have you guys hate me for and try to deliver something good rather than bang my head against the wall and make nothing but shit. I know it's tiny, but more shall come. Don't forget to leave a review and yell at me for making you wait.

48. Out Of The Blue, Into The Black

"Do you think you can find the turtle?" Roland asked, not for the first time. Not even the second time. He had asked El this at least a dozen times. Frankly, his zeal for the turtle was starting to grate on her nerves.

"How many times have he asked this question in the past two weeks?" Stan asked, laying on the ground and looking up into the darkening sky. They had been doing nothing but walking ever since Roland had declared that they were fit for travel.

It had been horrible.

All the kids were hungry, except for Jake who had had a long time to acclimate to their nomadic lifestyle. They tried to not complain about their sore muscles and their mostly empty stomachs, but being in their adolescence that was easier said than done.

Everyone had lost weight, but it wasn't nearly as obvious on the others as it was with Ben. Eddie the Elder had given him his belt so that his pants would stop falling down. Eddie the younger was in a constant state of panic about how much trouble he'd be in with his mom and how long it had been since they'd been back in Derry.

Everyone was anxious, it was just that Eddie wasn't capable of being quiet about it.

Richie seemed to be the only one unphased by the unpleasant turn of events. However, those who knew him best could see plainly how troubled he was. Jokes came a little less easily if they came at all.

"Just give her the blindfold and step off, Roland," Eddie the Elder suggested as he cooked their dinner. He wished they could ditch the kids at the closest town to save on their rations, but it wasn't like they came across towns every other day. Even if they did, the kids had come into this realm the same way he had. Rations were a hell of a lot smaller than usual, but Eddie couldn't just bail on the kids. Plus, he had a feeling Roland wouldn't be so willing to let go of the kids where one of them had special abilities. They were part of their

party, at least for the time being.

Reluctantly, Roland handed El the blindfold and left her alone.

El looked around, warily, as she walked through the Inbetween. There was no sign of the deadlights, but that didn't mean anything. She didn't want to see those lights ever again. She was visibly shaking, both in the Inbetween and in her physical body.

When she felt something touch her, her shoulder brushing against it in the void, she screamed in her shock and horror.

She only stopped screaming when she realized that she wasn't the only one screaming. She and the other screamer went quiet when they looked at each other. After a few seconds of taking in what they were seeing they began screaming again, this time not out of fear, but of glee.

"I've never been more happy to see you in my entire life!" El laughed as she and Sara threw themselves into each others' arms, hugging each other so tightly that they both seemed to be trying to crush each other to death, but out of affection.

"Likewise, sister," Sara replied, heaving a relieved sigh before pulling away, keeping her hands on El's shoulders. The whole point in Sara coming into the void was to try and get some information. Try and see the Mind Flayer or Pennywise or find where El and the others were. Pennywise and the Mind Flayer had both been a bust and she was starting to think that the others had been as well, but she and El had bumped into each other and she wasn't keen of them parting ways just yet. "What's going on? Where are you guys?"

With a roll of her eyes El said, "Hell, I'm pretty sure. We've been here for weeks and it feels like it's been years."

This caught Sara's attention. "Weeks? You've only been gone for maybe an hour and a half," she countered.

"That's not right," El insisted, shaking her head. "It's been ages."

"I'm not saying you're wrong or that you're lying," Sara said. "I'm just saying that it doesn't make sense."

"Since when has anything about our lives made sense?" El asked.

Sara tried to hold back a laugh and it came out as snort. "You're not wrong. Is everyone okay? No one's dead or anything right?"

"We're all fine," El answered, shaking her head. "Exhausted, but fine. We're with some people that call themselves gunslingers that are on their way to a Dark Tower."

"What?" Sara exclaimed. "No, no that's bad."

Cocking her eyebrow El asked, "What's bad?"

"The tower is bad!" Sara said.

"It is?" El asked.

"No...yes...I don't know, the tower is complicated and it's dangerous for those who get involved. The gunslingers, particularly their leader, aren't going to stop until they're either there or dead. It's nothing you need to concern yourself with. The last thing I want you guys doing is coming face to face with the Crimson King." Sara shuttered at the thought.

"Who's the Crimson King?" El asked.

"He wants to destroy the dark tower," Sara explained.

"But you said the tower was bad," El said. "Isn't that a good thing?"

Sara rubbed her head. She was getting a migraine. That always happened when she was doing anything concerning the dark tower, be it learning or discussing or even trying to forget. Maturin had really overshared where the tower was concerned. She just wished she could forget the tower even existed, but it was too late for that now. "The tower isn't bad, exactly, but it's dangerous. As soon as you guys can get out of there and come back home you need to do it."

"We've tried!" El said. "There's nothing around here but sand and clouds around the beam."

"Oh god you're under the beam," Sara groaned, burying her face in

her hands.

"We'll leave as soon as we can!" El insisted. "None of us wants to be here. We want to go home. Especially me. The leader of the gunslingers keeps pestering me about Maturin."

"The gunslingers should be more worried about the Crimson King," Sara mumbmbled.

"How do you know all of this?" El asked.

"I form mental bonds with animals and Maturin is the guardian of one of the beams," Sara said. "He doesn't understand that sometimes he can overshare."

"This tower seems important," El said.

"It is, but it's not for us to meddle in," Sara snapped. "I know it's tempting, espically where you're literally on the path to the tower, but please, you have to make sure everyone comes back. There has to be a way for you to get back if you got there."

"We'll keep looking, I promise," El said. "What are you doing?"

"Going into the sewers," Sara answered. "Bill and the others know where Pennywise was last time. It's not a guarantee, and it's dangerous as all hell, but it's the best chance we have."

"You're going after Pennywise without us?" El asked indignantly. "What about Mike and Will and the others?"

"They're coming too," Sara said. "Frankly, I'd feel better with you here since you can move things with your brain and shit, but time is of the essence. Everyone else but us is still frozen, the rifts are closed, and we can't just sit around doing nothing."

El was quiet for a moment, considering what she might say to Sara. She knew she was right. They had to do something. She knew her friends well enough to know that they were more likely to run into the fire than away from it.

"Take care of my friends," El said at last.

"We'll take care of each other," Sara said with a small smile. "Promise you'll find a way home?"

El nodded and the girls hugged each other again. Before letting each other go El asked, "What should I tell the gunslinger? He wants to know about the turtle."

"Tell him his concerns lie with the Crimson King and that's what he should be worried about," Sara answered, her face turning into a scowl at revisiting a disliked topic. "The turtle can't help him now."

49. The Turtle Couldn't Help Us

"What did you see?" Roland asked as soon as El removed her blindfold. "Did you find the turtle?"

El had to stop herself from rolling her eyes. Roland was nice enough when you ignored the fact that he could be an obsessive pain. He had a bug up his ass about talking to the turtle. If he was anything like he was concerning the turtle in regard to the tower then El wasn't sure if she could stand it. She didn't deny the allure that the tower had. The mystery it possessed. It seemed like a mystery she wasn't meant to solve, though. Her issue was elsewhere with It and the mind flayer. Suddenly, more than ever, she wished she was back home.

"No," El said curtly. "I didn't see Maturin. I saw my sister, though."

Richie, who had been half asleep and eating perked up at this. "You saw Sara?" he asked. "How did she seem? Is she okay?"

"Sara is fine," she said shortly, not wanting Richie to get his motormouth running. "She said that we shouldn't go to the Dark Tower and that it's dangerous."

"We know it's dangerous, but we're still going," Eddie the elder said, crossing his arms securely over his chest.

"Not you," El retorted. "The kids from Derry and Hawkins. She said we need to get back. She also said that we've only been missing for about an hour and a half."

"What?" most of the Derry and Hawkins exclaimed at once.

"That's impossible!" Eddie the younger said. "We've been here for ages and ages and ages! I'm about to lose my fucking mind because of how long we've been here!"

"Settle down, sugar," Susanna said. "Time works different around here."

"Works like a junky detoxing on adderall," Eddie the elder said.

"How can a junky be detoxing if they're on adderall?" Richie asked.

"Exactly," Eddie the elder said, crossing his arms over his chest.

Frankly, Eddie's explanation somehow cleared up some confusion while causing some more. Jake, wanting to get off the topic, asked, "Did your sister know anything about the turtle?"

"She said he couldn't help you," El said. "Said that what you need to worry about is the Crimson King."

"The Crimson King?" Max asked incredulously. "Are you kidding me? God, this is like one of the boys's stupid Dungeons and Dragons games only it makes less sense and there's no pizza."

"Pizza!" Eddie the elder and Jake both exclaimed excitedly.

"Man, I have missed pizza," Eddie the elder mused.

Trying, and failing, to hide his annoyance, Roland said, "And how would your sister know about if the turtle can help

"She knows him," El answered. "I've met him. He called her his friend. I'm not sure that he has many, living in the Inbetween and all. At least I think he lives there."

"Bill's met the turtle though," Eddie said thoughtfully.

This caught everyone's attention. "It's true, he told us," Richie added. Stan and Bev nodded in confirmation. "He and Nina had a very lengthy discussion about it in the club house."

"Like 70 hours long," Eddie muttered.

"You weren't even there for most of it," Ben scoffed.

"Because my mom's a psycho and would kill me if I got home late," Eddie declared.

"That would be the worst," Eddie the elder said. "As a hypochondriac, I'm sure you're aware of how bad dying can be for your health."

"He told Bill about the Ritual of Chüd and how to kill the monster in Derry," Bev said before Eddie could rise to his own defense or someone else could crack a joke.

"Ritual of Chüd?" Roland repeated, aghast.

"It obviously didn't work," Max said. "That thing's back with a vengeance."

"Maybe someone smarter than It needs to be the one to do the ritual," Richie countered. "I volunteer. I'm clearly better than you dummies."

"Couldn't this turtle do this...rutial?" Susanna asked, shifting in her wheelchair.

"The turtle couldn't help us," Stan said, the suddenness and forwardness of his words stunning all of them into silence. It was a truth that applied to all of them. The turtle couldn't help them with Pennywise. The turtle couldn't help them with the Mind Flayer. The turtle couldn't help them with the Crimson King or the Dark Tower. The one thing that the group had in common was an affiliation with monsters, and now Maturin.

"Who's the Crimson King?" Roland asked once the reality of Stan's words settled into them, slipping into the bones of all who heard them.

El shook her head, "I don't know."

50. Red Balloon

"I swear to god, I have never before wanted to go back to Derry, but I would do unspeakable things to get back into that shithole town right about now," Richie said for what felt like the thousandth time since the sun came up.

"I'd do unspeakable things to get you to shut the fuck up," Eddie countered.

Roland took a deep and long breath, trying to conceal how vexed he was. It had been days since El had spoken to Sara and had turned up nothing. He should have known better than to put his faith in the girl, but she had proven her worth in other ways. The fact that the kids knew about the ritual was concerning enough. Not for him, but for them. Whatever they were up against wasn't anything compared to the tower, but for a bunch of kids, it couldn't be easy. They weren't gunslingers like he was, but if they survived fighting something that the ritual needed to be used against they could have been well over their heads.

"Roland, can we talk for a second?" Eddie the elder asked, using the kids' squabble as a cover.

"Aye," Roland replied, hanging back with his companion until the kids were far enough ahead that they wouldn't hear their conversation. He had a feeling he already knew what it was about. If he was right then he shared Eddie's concerns. They'd hardly been able to supply food for themselves and now they had to worry about feeding 7 other kids. Their stores were getting low and Roland didn't know how long they'd have food to keep them from starving to death.

As Roland had thought Eddie said, "We need to go hunting or foraging or something. We have enough food for maybe two more days and that's it."

"Where, exactly, do you suggest we find this food?" Roland asked, gesturing at the wasteland around them.

"I don't know, Roland," Eddie replied. "We have to do something

though. Those kids have put a royal fork in the gears of this whole operation and I'd rather not starve to death if we can manage it. I already put myself on quarter rations to save a bit."

"I know, Eddie," Roland said. "I have too. I know about the problem."

"Well, what are we planning on doing about not starving to death?" Eddie asked. "I don't know about you, Roland, but I can't do any walking if I'm dead."

"I understand your concerns, Eddie," Roland said. "Frankly, this wasn't my first choice either, but we couldn't just leave them there. They would have died."

"Yeah, but we wouldn't have," Eddie mumbled.

With a shake of his head, Roland said, "You don't mean that."

Sulking, Eddie replied, "No, I don't. But I wish I did."

"We just have to keep doing what-"

Roland stopped talking when he realized that something was off all a sudden. Eddie seemed to feel a change in the air just seconds after Roland had. There was silence, brought on so suddenly that its impact felt like a bullet.

Looking for what had made the kids fall silent, Roland and Eddie both scanned the wasteland. Roland saw it first. A single red balloon floating close to the ground, dragging a string behind it. It was odd, certainly, but the reaction of horror and silence wouldn't be what he had expected.

"Umm...is everyone okay?" Eddie asked, giving Roland a sideways glance before looking back at the balloon, which was getting closer and closer to them.

"It's It!" Stan screamed, destroying the silence and scrambling to get towards the back of the group, suddenly hysterical.

The squabbling began again, some kids also concerned about the balloon being 'It' while others were demanding that their companions

calm down. The only ones who were silent were Roland, Eddie Dean, Jake, and Susannah. They shared a few glances between each other, never speaking a word, but still asking each other the same question: What on earth was so terrifying about a red balloon?

Getting a headache from the shouting, Eddie drew his gun, pointed it at the balloon and fired.

The balloon burst, but none of them were expecting the air from the balloon to burst out of its confines so violently. They all held up their hands to cover their faces, protecting their eyes from the burst of wind that came from the balloon. Eddie Kaspbrak, Richie, Ben and Stan formed a huddle, protecting themselves and each other from the flying sand. Bev and Max did the same as Blue burrowed between them, whining as she did so. El was the only one of the Lucky Seven who didn't hide her face and Roland was the only one of the gunslingers to face the storm head-on. They looked at each other briefly, blinking dust out of their eyes before El put her hands up, telekinetically forcing the sand to veer away from her rather than at her. Roland turned his head down, using the brim of his hat to block the worst of it. The wind lasted longer than it had any right to, blowing strong and hard until their group was either breathless or near to it.

Then, as suddenly as the wind began, it stopped.

They only dared to try and breathe, coughing dust from their lungs almost a minute after the wind stopped, just to be sure it was safe.

"What the hell was that?" Jake exclaimed once his windpipe and nostrils were mostly clear of sand.

"I dunno," Max said, stepping away from Bev and pushing her mess of hair behind one of her ears, trying to ignore the close proximity in which the girls had found themselves.

"You don't think Pennywise is out here, do you?" Richie asked before holding down one of his nostrils and shooting a sandy snot rocket onto the ground, provoking the disgusted complaints from Max and Bev, a confused look from El, and an 'I'm-a-mother-shaking-my-head-at-my-children' look from Susannah.

"It was only a red balloon, Richie, you dumbass," Stan shouted, slipping back into his hysterics again. "Nothing good ever happens when we see a fucking red balloon! It's like Pennywise's calling card! It doesn't matter where we go, he'll find us! We're cursed forever because we were idiots and thought we were strong enough to beat that damn clown!"

"Settle down, Stan," Eddie said, reaching out to touch Stan's shoulder in an attempt to calm him down. Stan, however, was having none of that and he slapped Eddie's hand away.

"Stop acting like I'm being crazy!" Stan shouted. "I'm the only one acting normal! You guys should be terrified and you're acting like this isn't a big deal and like that clown can't kill us! He can kill us! He's not afraid of us! He killed Betty Ripsom and Georgie and he's going to kill us too!"

"Guys," Ben said, hoping to get their attention, bending down to pick something up that had rolled against his shoes.

"You're having a mental breakdown, Stan," Bev said. "You need to calm down."

"GUYS!" Ben repeated, this time louder as he unrolled the piece of paper that had landed at his feet.

This finally got them all to shut up and look at what Ben was trying to show them. He swallowed a lump in his throat as he read the page before passing it around their group so they could see what he'd found.

"What's it mean?" Jake asked as he studied the not.

"It's messing with us," Max declared.

"Maybe," El said, taking the note from Jake and looking it over again. "It could be a way home, though."

"That's just great," Stan huffed. "Carnival music and now this stupid message. Do you remember the last time Pennywise left us a message?"

Before anyone from the Loser's Club could answer, El raised her hand to silence him. "What do you mean 'carnival music'?"

"The fucking carnival music that's playing!" Stan shouted. "Like you'd hear at a circus or a freak show or something. Everyone knows what carnival music is!"

Everyone went quiet and exchanged concerned looks. Finally, Ben said what everyone else was too nervous to say.

"Stan...there's no music playing."

Considering how long it's been since I was actively writing this, I think I'm doing pretty well about being consistent. Let's see how long it lasts. If I'm lucky I'll finish this story before I run out of steam. I mean...I probably will. This story's almost done. Like...maybe 10 chapters, and these chapters aren't super long so the end is near! Be afraid. Be very afraid. Also, either this next chapter will touch base with the kids in Derry or some more of The Lucky Seven. Which should I do? Any votes? Any at all? k, leaveareviewiloveyoubye

51. Should I Stay Or Should I Go

The tunnels were dark and the walls too close.

Will, despite this, walked on, his eyes following the two beams of light ahead and behind them as they descended deeper into the heart of Derry. Where It lived.

Bill and Mike (W.) lead them into the abyss, the paladins of their party. Mike (H.) and Lucas hung behind them, a ranger and, at least in Will's eyes, a cleric. He, a magicless wizard and Dustin, a silent bard, hung farther back with Sara, who he might consider to be a rogue. Not that he thought Sara was a thief or a scoundrel, he just thought that she was clever and knew how to use that to her advantage.

Sara, despite her best efforts, was having a hard time keeping upright, let alone keeping up with the group. She was keeping her third eye, or ear, open for any signs of Pennywise or The Mind Flayer. Not that Will thought the Mind Flayer would be back. He didn't necessarily have complete faith in Sara, but something about the claim that the doors were all closed felt so final and sediment that he couldn't fathom why he could question if they might still be open. It felt to him less like a claim and more like a proven fact. He was sure that the others felt the same way. The fact that Lucas wasn't arguing that maybe, just maybe, the Mind Flayer was still out there made Will feel certain that none of them doubted it. They could all feel it like he did

There was a splash and the party turned to see its cause. The flashlights fell upon Sara, who was on her hands and knees, squinting into the beams the lit her up. Her breathing was heavy and there were trails of blood coming from both of her nostrils and her tear ducts.

"I'm fine," she said, moving to stand up, supporting herself on the wall before pulling away from her hand and wiping off slimy residue onto her shorts.

"You're not fine," Dustin insisted, grabbing her before she could fall

over. "We need to stop and rest. You're no use to us if you exhaust yourself."

"W-w-wh-at's wrong, Sara?" Bill asked, moving around Lucas so he could get a better look at his friend.

"Nothing," Sara countered. "There's a lot going on down here. A lot of rats that have a lot to say."

"Rats?" Mike (W.) repeated sounding horrified.

Mike (H.) looked at Mike (W.) incredulously before saying, "It's a sewer. We are literally inside a sewer. Of course, there are rats."

"Rats who keep warning me to go the other way," Sara said, panting, finally letting Dustin link her arm around his neck so he could keep on her feet.

"The rats are telling you to go the other way?" Lucas repeated slowly. "What does that even mean?"

"We're getting close," Bill said, turning to look down the sewer pathway again, his head held high and his eyes looking misplaced upon his face. They were the eyes of a man come from war, preparing to face the battlefield for what he hoped to be the last time.

They exchanged a few unspoken glances before Will asked the question that was plaguing them all. "Do you think It knows we're coming?"

"It knows," Sara answered, wiping the fresh blood coming out of her nose away, leaving behind a bloody sewer smudge in its place.

"Let's go," Mike (W.) said, a sudden determination in his voice. The sooner they finished with Pennywise the sooner they could focus on the problem that he was more concerned about; finding El.

Sara slipped and nearly fell again, but this time Dustin was there to catch her. She told him that she was fine, but he was having none of that and he pulled her onto his back, piggyback style. Despite how adamantly she insisted that she was fine, Sara didn't complain or try

to get away. She shut her eyes and, despite her best efforts, fell asleep.

Time seemed to stretch on. They couldn't tell if they'd been there in the sewers for an hour or a hundred years. Despite this, they trudged on into the black.

Will stayed close to Sara and Dustin, bringing up the back of their train and trying to ignore the fact that the last time he had felt as scared and alone as he did in the sewers was when he was alone in the Upside Down. There had only been one thing that made him feel better then.

Keeping his voice low so it wouldn't be easily heard, Will started to hum *Should I Stay or Should I Go* by The Clash, keeping his eyes peeled for anything unusual. He wouldn't sing though. Not this time. This time there were others around and they were on the alert for monsters.

"If I go there will be trouble," a voice that wasn't Will's sang, echoing off the close walls and through the sewers. "If I stay it will be double."

"Sara, you should be resting," Dustin snapped.

Ignoring him, Sara continued, "So you've gotta let me know!"

"Be quiet!" Lucas snapped. "The monster will hear us!"

Still singing to the tune of the song Sara replied, "The monster already knows, that we're coming so let's go."

Will was both horrified and pleased to realize that Sara was right. The monster knew they were coming. They didn't have stealth on their side. They'd rolled a one in stealth so they might as well go in singing battle hymns and striking their shields. Metaphorically, of course. REalizing this, Will joined in, singing as loud as he could with Sara.

Lucas and Dustin both tried to quiet them down, but it was of no use. Before long, Mike (H.) started singing with them too. Then Bill, despite his stutter, joined his rambling voice to the choir. Bill gave Mike (W.) a nudge with his elbow and then Mike (W.) chuckled and

added his voice to theirs. Dustin and Lucas were the last ones to join in the song, but they did all the same. They sang the song again once they reached its end, and perhaps even a third time.

The music made them feel light and cheerful, despite their dark and dismal didn't matter that they had sewer water in their shoes and their bellies felt empty, they felt strong and invincible.

That was, at least, until they all saw the door and their voices and their feet stopped.

They had made it.

Now, that they had made it through the dungeon, it was finally time to face the dragon.

dun dun duuuuun!

52. Out Of The Black, Into The Blue

Roland watched Stan incredulously as Eddie Dean held the boy, binding his arms down to his sides. Everyone else kept their distance, and Roland didn't condemn them for it. The wasteland was mute, aside from Stan's unintelligible shrieking, but the boy was so hysterical that no one could make out a word that he was saying. Even the trash mouth had nothing to say.

"Sugar, you need to calm down," Susanna spoke, trying to sooth the boy when he ran out of breath and stopped howling.

"I can't take it anymore!" Stanley shouted, his voice revived. "You have guns so what's the point of having them if you don't put them to use? Do it! Just do it, you motherfuckers!"

"Kid, we're not going to shoot you," Eddie Dean said, rolling his eyes.

"We've been out here for weeks, following this beam to a tower that Sara specifically told us not to go to. We're running out of food, there's no sign of us ever going back home, we keep getting calling cards from Pennywise, and this is never going to end!" Stan shouted. "I would rather die than see another one of those balloons again. It's the same thing over and over and over and over, and I can't take it anymore! We're never getting back to Derry! We are going to die out here, and at this point, I would prefer to do it sooner rather than later. Just shoot me right between the eyes already and leave me to die."

"No one is killing anyone," Roland said definitely.

"I don't want to go to the tower," Eddie Kaspbrak spoke up. "I don't want to die out here either."

"I don't want to see another balloon either," Ben grumbled. They'd encountered half a dozen red balloons, each with a nasty surprise inside. One had been full of hornets, another covered them in blood, one screamed and almost made them deaf, one was so traumatizing Ben didn't even want to think about it.

Each balloon had the same note. The kids all wanted to burn them, but Roland wouldn't let them. He said that paper was rare and precious in the world they were in. As long as the kids didn't have to see the notes, they didn't care either way. They knew what they said. Knew it by heart.

I hear you like poems

Fat boy, you do

So I've writ a lovely

Poem for you

No January Embers

No heart in your chest

Now sit your ass down

And read all the rest

Stay above ground

And children be wary

Don't talk to clowns

And stay far from Derry

Ben didn't like thinking about it, but whenever he wasn't walking or worried he was going to starve to death, those words swirled around his mind.

"Guys," Max said, trying to get their attention. Not that it was doing any good. Stan was still yelling at the gunslingers, telling them to kill him already. When no one acknowledged her, Max shouted, "Guys!" once more, just to ensure they had heard her.

This time, they went quiet and turned to look at her.

"What is it?" Roland asked.

Instead of answering, Max pointed at what had caught her eye.

It was another balloon, but this one wasn't floating towards them, and it wasn't red. It was green. It swayed back and forth in the breeze, almost beckoning them to approach.

"It's not coming towards us," El said, squinting and shielding her eyes so she could see it better.

"And it's green," Eddie Kasbrak said.

"It could be a trick," Jake said.

Max shook her head, a smile cracking her face. "No, it doesn't feel like the others."

"It doesn't feel like the others?" Stan repeated.

The kids glanced briefly at Stan before looking back at the green balloon. If he hadn't been so hysterical, he might have felt it too. It was different.

Before anyone could say a word to talk her out of it, Max started running towards the balloon. Her friends yelled at her to come back, but she didn't. She just kept running. Roland yelled at her to come back, but she didn't. Heaving an annoyed sigh, Roland ordered that the others stay there before he started running after Max.

Blue yipped excitedly before running after Roland and Max, just happy for a change in the routine. After that, everyone completely disregarded Roland's request. Eddie Dean pushed his wife in her wheelchair after the gaggle of children and Jake had gotten swept up in the need to run with a bunch of kids his age. The only one who didn't take off after the dog was Stan, who lingered back and considered if he should stay in the path of the beam on his own or go after his friends. Finally, the discomfort at being left alone, he put his head down and started sprinting after the others. By the time he reached them, he was winded and displeased, at least until he saw what the balloon was tied to.

"Roland...that door's not like the other doors," Eddie Dean said at last after they had all gotten a chance to look at the door.

"Do you think it's some kind of a trap?" Ben asked, gently toeing a rock towards the door.

"Who cares?" Stan exclaimed, jolting forward toward the door embedded in the earth. He just wanted out of the wasteland, and if whatever was on the other side of that door killed him then it was just as well.

Before he could get to the door, Roland caught him by the shoulder and held him in place. "What happened to everyone staying put?"

"Uh, Roland, I think we have other issues," Eddie Dean said, gesturing over his shoulder to whatever it was that had caught his attention.

They all looked up to see a figure, far off in the distance, but too close for comfort, dressed in bright yellow and walking lazily toward them.

"Who the fuck is that?" Richie asked.

El narrowed her eyes and shook her head at the figure. "Bad."

"We need to go," Bev said. "We have to get in the clubhouse."

"Clubhouse?" Roland repeated, not taking his eyes off the yellow figure. "You know this door?"

"Yeah, we know it," Eddie said. "But if it's a trap I'd rather stay out here."

"You don't want to get mixed up with what's on our tails, sugar," Susanna said. "If this is your way home I think you'd better take it."

"Let's go already!" Stan shouted, moving towards the door again. This time, Roland let him go and watched as the boy threw open the door and jumped inside. No one else was as eager as him, which was an unusual shift.

The kids exchanged glances and said their goodbyes before going after them. Ben helped Bev and Max in before going through the door himself. Eddie went after that. Roland and Jake were waiting to help Richie and El into the door. El and Richie weren't as eager to leave,

looking at the man in yellow walking towards them. He was still far away enough that he was a dot on the horizon, but they were being followed. Richie felt in his gut that whatever was on them was no good. He didn't need Eddie Dean to tell him, but Eddie Dean told him anyway.

El went first, and Rich followed. Once his feet touched the ground, which was hard and flooded up to his ankles, he looked up at the open door and called for Blue to come after them. Blue was just in his line of sight when the door swung down of its own volition and slammed shut.

Riche shouted in protest before getting up on his toes to try and shove the door back open again, but it was no good. The door was gone, and so was Blue. For the first time in weeks, he was dreading rather than dreaming of seeing Sara again. She would kill him when she found out that Blue got left behind. He wanted to cry, not just for Sara. He loved Blue as much as Sara did. There wasn't time for that now, though.

It was dark, smelled literally like shit, and they had no idea where they were.

"Blue!" Stan called from somewhere ahead of Richie. "Come here, Blue!"

"Blue's gone, you asshole," Richie snapped. "The door shut before she could get in here."

No one had anything to say to that. They had all loved Blue, in their own way. Someone was crying gently. If Richie had to guess he'd say it was Bev. He was right, but that wasn't important.

"Where the hell are we?" Max asked, wanting to focus less on the group's lost dog and more on getting the hell out of the hole they were in.

"Downtown, about a block away from the pharmacy," Eddie said, without hesitation. "Back under Derry."

"How the fuck do you know that?" Max asked, surprised that he was

so specific and sure of himself.

"If anyone knows where we are it's Eddie," Bev said. "Boy has a map in his brain, I swear to god."

"Everyone, get behind Eds and let's get out of here," Richie said, sounding decades older than he was.

They linked arms so that no one would get lost before they started heading in the direction Eddie had deemed the correct way out. Ben held up the line for a moment. He thought he had heard something. It was crazy, of course, but he thought he heard someone singing *Should I Stay or Should I Go* by the Clash. However, the singing stopped before he could think about it too much. He wanted to find the source of the singing, but he couldn't follow a song if it wasn't playing anymore.

He heaved a sigh and pressed on. They walked for hours, it seemed, before there was finally something ahead of them that wasn't shadows and shit water. It was light. Max pointed it out first and, in one voice, they cheered and hollered that there was light at the end of the tunnel. The nightmare was over.

They ran as fast as they could, out of the black and into the blue.

Behold, they're back. Also, close encounters of the sewage kind, because I'm an asshole. Don't forget to review, love ya bye!

53. Awake Is The New Sleep

"There's no sign of them anywhere," Steve panted as he ran back to the site of the picnic, the last to arrive.

Liz covered her mouth to choke out a sob and Joyce put a hand on the other woman's shoulder.

Nancy made a dissatisfied noise before turning her back to the group and shouting her brother's name again, despite how hopeless their situation seemed.

"It'll be okay, Nance," Jonathan said, though his words were hallowed by the strain of worrying about his brother. Again.

"We didn't even look away or anything, they just...weren't there anymore," Steve said. "I mean...they gotta be somewhere, right?"

Hopper scowled at Steve but didn't say anything before taking a drag off his cigarette. He wasn't worried that his kids weren't there. He was worried as to where they might be. Maybe the mind flayer had decided to take them to the upside down. He didn't know how, but he would find a way to kill whatever had taken his girls away from him again.

"What are we supposed to do now?" Nancy huffed, glaring at the place in the water where her brother and his friends had been.

"Keep an eye out and head back to base camp," Hopper said. "They're smart...and we can't help them."

The sudden, profound expression of a thought he didn't realize was his own and possibly wasn't entirely his own, made Hopper stop in his tracks. He knew he was right. Whatever mess the kids were into, it wasn't anything he or the others could help with. They were on their own. All he could do was wait and hope they would make it home safe

a tiny chapter because I have a tiny heart

54. Reunited And It Feels So Good

Jim took a deep breath as he stepped towards the door to the garage, his pistol cocked and ready. Not that he was sure his pistol would be much use that clown thing. Still, it was better to be prepared than to be sorry.

He switched on the light, threw open the door and held his gun at the ready.

"Jesus Christ, not again!" Eddie exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air, dropping the soda and snacks he had been cradling in his arms.

So relieved at the sight before him, Hopper lowered his gun and started laughing. "Guys! It's just the kids!" he yelled into the house.

With this news, Joyce, Liz, and the others barrelled out of the kitchen and into the garage, rushing past Hopper as he uncocked and holstered his gun.

Joyce's grin faltered when she realized that not all of the kids were there and the ones who were there looked like they had been ridden hard and put up wet. She could have sworn that Ben had lost at least ten pounds within the two hours since she had seen them.

"Where are the others?" Liz asked.

"They aren't back?" Richie barked.

"Long story," El sighed, moving in to give her dad a hug, which he returned.

Liz and Joyce exchanged glances before their hostess said, "Well, you can tell us while I make us some dinner.

Not having had a real meal in weeks, the kids were more than happy to oblige, though they were all concerned for their friends. After all, they had expected that The Mikes, Bill, Will, Lucas, Dustin, and Sara would have been at home. Still, after the ordeal they had gone through, they wanted some answers and some food.

Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan were still out looking for them so, if they were lucky, when they came back there would be another seven kids with them.

They exchanged most of their information as Liz cooked and Joyce did her best to help. Richie and Max did most of the talking, everyone else too tired to do much else. With no regard of personal space, the others laid together on the floor, some going to sleep and others just resting and listening. It was hard to tell which.

"So you really have no idea where the others are?" Max repeated after they had heard and said everything

Joyce rubbed the girl's shoulders and said, "No, sweetie. I wish we did. We haven't seen Will or Mike or any of the others since you all disappeared.

"Well...maybe Jonathan and Nancy will find them," Max said hopefully.

Richie, who was less of his obnoxious self than usual, muttered, "Fat chance of that."

El, who was half asleep and wedged on the floor between Eddie and Bev, opened one of her eyes and looked at Richie. He was right. Nancy, Jonathan, or Steve wouldn't be able to find them. Not unless they went underground.

There was still hope though. They couldn't find them...but El could. Without a word, El used her arm to cover her eyes and slipped into the void.

I think I have an issue with writing normal length chapters. But behold...it is done. After this, there are only like 5 chapters left. Give or take. OMG SADNESS

55. Another Door

"It's not too late to turn back," Dustin said as they stared down the door.

"Are you sure about that, toothless?" They all froze and looked around the chamber where they had found themselves. The only door was the one before them and the archway they had come through, and the group became suddenly unaware of it.

"We should have waited until El was here for this," Mike muttered under his breath.

"Oh, it's too late for that, frog face," Pennywise laughed.

Before they could react the sound of bricks clanking together clattered through the silent void. The passageway they'd come through was sealing itself off. By the time the party had realized it, the wall had already closed up. That didn't stop Dustin, Will, and Mike (H.) from rushing against the newly formed wall and banging their fists against it. Sara, Mike (W.), Bill, and Lucas edged closer together, casting their wary eyes between each other. The wall closed up, and the laughter of It rang up through around the chamber.

Dustin, Will, and Mike (H.) gathered with the others, looking for any sign of the clown, but nothing appeared. The only sign of the monster was the unwavering laughter, rising and falling in unexpected turns.

"What do we do now?" Mike (W.) asked, keeping his voice low.

"The only way out is through," Bill said, his face fixed with determination.

"I'm not touching that door," Dustin scoffed.

"Touch it or not, Bill's right," Sara said. "We have to go through."

"I can't open that door," Dustin repeated adamantly. "I won't open that door."

"No one's asking you to open it," Lucas snapped.

Will glanced through the group, and he caught Sara's eye. His glance was all it took for her to understand his intentions. She tried to stop him, but before she could even get a syllable out, he was rushing for the door. Hands grabbed for him, and the party yelled for him to stop in unison, but it was too late. He pushed the door open, and a maelstrom blazed into the chamber, blasting them until they fell apart, swept alone around the room.

Screams echoed through the room, but none loud enough to mute the deafening, dark laughter.

Lucas saw his little sister, but she wasn't herself. Her eyes were black, and her mouth was unnaturally wide, and she smiled at him, exposing long, sharp, yellow teeth, dripping with black blood. Her eyes were yellow and blazing, and their parents were laying at her feet, their heads removed and held aloft in Erica's hands, their dying screams of terror still frozen on their faces.

El was telling Mike (W.) that he was useless. He couldn't save anyone, and she never wanted to see him again. Then Will said the same, followed by Dustin, Lucas, Nancy, his parents, and everyone he had ever cared about had gone, leaving him utterly alone.

Dustin's mother was pinned under Dart, begging to Dustin to help her, but try as he might, he couldn't move. He couldn't get to his mother until the demodog had done its work and his mom was dead.

Mike (H.) saw his parents trapped and burning along with all his family and friends. He wanted to move to help them, but he couldn't even breathe until all that remained of them was ash and bone.

Sara was the only one not screaming, but she silently wept, watching as her father said that she was cursed. She wasn't worth the trouble. It would have been better for all of them if she had died.

Bill saw Georgie, as he always did, echoing his tireless chorus: you'll float too. You'll float too. You'll float too.

Will was in the upside down. Surviving was a struggle as his body slowly started shutting down. There was one door to home left open, but it was closing fast. He'd never get to it in time. There wasn't any

hope left.

El shot up from her resting place, gasping for air and close to hysterics. She tried to speak, but only nonsense followed.

"Slow down, kid," Hopper told her gently as he took her face in his hands and started taking deep breaths. She followed in suit until she had calmed down enough to speak.

"I saw them," she said once she was able. "I saw them all."

"Are they alright?" Joyce asked anxiously.

El shook her head, her eyes filling with tears. "They're alive, but they're...screaming."

Joyce and Liz took each other's hands and covered their mouths to try and contain their worry.

"Where are they?" Richie asked. "If we can get to them we can help them."

"I don't know," El admitted, her ears brimming with tears. "I can't help them."

****returns from the dead* alloooo there. bet you thought you'd seen the last of me.***

56. Pennywise

The wind slowed until, suddenly, Pennywise's laughter wasn't the only voice rising above the gale. As the rest of the party realized that it wasn't the only one laughing the wind began to die. The raging gusts stopped when the boys were all looking at Sara, who was laughing so hard that she had fallen on the ground, tears still streaming from her eyes.

"Great," Dustin huffed. "She's cracked."

"I'm n-not sure we're much b-b-better," Bill replied.

Will, being the closest one to her, knelt next to her said, "Sara?" Will asked, reaching out and putting a hand on her shoulder. "Is everything alright?"

Still laughing, Sara somehow managed to say, "We are so fucking stupid!" Another burst of laughter destroyed any chance of her elaborating on that statement. There were many ways that she could be right, certainly. They were spending the last of their long weekend, perhaps the last of their last weekend, in a sewer hunting a monster. They could have been at the quarry or playing Dungeons and Dragons, but instead, they were in the realm of Pennywise.

"Maybe we can knock down the wall and go back," Lucas suggested.

"We can't go BACK," Sara exclaimed, her laughter baiting a bit, but not much.

"The wall wasn't there before," Lucas argued. "Maybe it's an illusion."

"God, you're so stupid," Sara said before she started laughing aloud again.

"Maybe It's taken over her mind, and she's gone completely crazy," Dustin said, taking a wary step away from the laughing member of their party.

"I'm not crazy!" Sara shouted, the laughter gone from her voice and replaced by anger. She got onto her feet and stomped towards Dustin,

raising her finger and pointing it at him. "You're blind! You're all so fucking blind! I'm not crazy! I am AWAKE!"

She panted, her back curved and heaving from the effort to catch her breath. The boys stayed quiet and moved away from her, their concern suddenly replaced by fear, both of her and for her.

"What do you see, Sara?" Bill asked, being the only one brave enough to speak and fill the silence.

"The only way out is through," Sara said, pointing at the door, which had closed when the wind stopped.

With that, the boys all erupted into outraged bickering. None of them were eager to open the door after what had happened before. Sara was the only one who was silent, looking from face to face as some of them argued for opening the door and others argued against it. The cacophony was so chaotic that it was hard to tell who was saying what. It was just noise.

Sara started to whistle a carnival tune and moved out of the knot her friends had formed around her. The song filled the chamber and made the boys fall silent. When the only sounds that remained were the drips of water, and the eerie melody did Sara stop. With a smirk, she called out, "Oh Pennywise...come out come out wherever you are."

Dustin tried to tell her to shut up, but before he couldn't get a word out, Bill silenced him by putting a hand over his mouth.

There was no response at first, but still, they waited. Then, he arrived, materializing in front of Sara with his bloody red grin, puffy silver costume, and blazing yellow yes. He reached out and touched her hair, bringing his sharp red teeth near to her ear. "Are you ready to float, Nine?"

Sara bristled a bit at that. "My name is Sara."

"And I'm Pennywise, the dancing clown," he said, taking her hand and taking it to his mouth. His tongue slid out, serpentine, twisted and wet. Dustin and Bill both started to move for her, but the others

managed to keep them in place. Sara didn't seem phased by Pennywise taking a taste.

"Are you afraid, Nine?" Pennywise asked, laughing.

"No," Sara said shortly.

Pennywise scowled and pulled her hand back to his mouth, inhaling deeply before he cast her hand away so quickly that she wound up on the ground. Bill managed to break away and pulled Sara against him, glaring up at Pennywise.

"Don't you f-fucking touch her, you c-c-cunt!" Bill shouted.

"C-c-c-c-c-c-CUNT!" Pennywise shouted back angrily.

Sara reached behind her and put a hand on Bill's shoulder. "It's okay, Bill. It's not really here."

"Bill looked down at her and gave her a confused look, which she returned with a reassuring smile. "What do you mean 'It's n-not here?'"

"It never was," Sara answered.

"But you ARE here!" Pennywise bellowed. "You'll never get out!"

"The way out is through," Sara chuckled.

The clown lunged at her, wrapping its hands around her throat. The party screamed, but Sara just laughed. "You can't know that!"

"I know everything, Pennywise. I know what you and the mind flayer have been up to," she chuckled. "This isn't over."

Pennywise squeezed her throat, making her choke, but despite this, she still managed to laugh at him. "We'll see you later, *Bob Grey*," she giggled.

Then, Pennywise was gone, and the door eased open.

Hello everyone! I have either good or bad news. Good news...I'm updating again! Yay! Potentially bad news...the next chapter is the last one. Then

maybe I'll start a sequel with the crew as adults. I don't know, but it's long since time that this story gets a finish.

57. Silence Before The Storm

"Do you seriously think that we're going to find them?" Steve asked as they made their way through the barrens. They'd already gone through the town. Twice. They hadn't had any luck there so they'd decided to go into the wilds of Derry.

"We have to keep trying," Nancy snapped, and she forced the pathway. "My brother is missing, Steve. I'm not stopping until we find them."

"If you'd stop bickering then maybe you'd find us a bit quicker!" a distant voice shouted out.

Nancy, Steve, and Jonathan froze and looked at each other, confirming that they had all heard it. "That sounded like Will," Jonathan said.

"It was Will!" Dustin's voice shouted back. "Get us out of here!"

"It could be a trick," Steve said. "It could be that...that thing."

"Or it could be my brother, Steve," Nancy snapped, blazing forward towards the voices.

"It is your brother," Mike called back. "Please get us out of here!"

Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve found the kids in a sewer vent that was padlocked shut. It took almost half an hour of beating and breaking stones against the locks before they finally came free and, at last, the party was free.

The reunion at the Fischer was joyful but short-lived. El, Max, Bev, Ben, Stan, Richie, and Eddie had caught the others up when they got home. They had taken the time to eat and nap after that, but they all wordlessly filed out the door and back into the barrens. There was something else they needed to discuss.

Fourteen gathered in an opening in the barrens, sitting in a close circle.

"What happened in the sewers back there?" Mike asked, eager to get their discussion underway.

"Pennywise was never awake," she said.

"That doesn't make any sense, though," Eddie said. "It killed your dad. Your Fischer dad."

"It's...complicated," Sara admitted. "The mind flayer got to Pennywise, and It was awake in a sense, but It never woke up. It's still deep in the earth, fast asleep, but It and the mind flayer have been a couple of busy little assholes."

"What do you mean?" Dustin asked.

"I mean busy," Sara repeated.

"You been like...*busy*?" Richie asked, his face contorting in disgusted confusion.

"I mean they were procreating and made some nasty zygotes," Sara snapped, annoyed at having to keep repeating herself. "They fucked and now we're fucked."

"But the mind flayer shut the doors," Mike said as he took El's hand in his, though it was unclear if he was trying to comfort her or himself. "It can't get back in here. That's a good thing, right?"

"The gates are unstable on both sides," Sara said. "Once It gives birth-"

"Wait a second," Dustin interrupted. "It is a girl?"

Rolling her eyes, Sara answered, "Yes, It is female. When the offspring are born the mind flayer won't need the gates."

"How do you know all this?" Max asked, not entirely convinced.

With a shrug, Sara said, "I don't know. Our minds linked up somehow, like with the mind flayer. I saw everything...too much. It's fading away now, but I still feel it, like a shadow on the back of my neck."

"We have to stop them somehow," El declared.

Sara reached into Richie's pocket, ignoring his protests as she took out his pocket knife and sliced open a cut on each palm. "I'm glad we agree," Sara said, offering the knife to her sister. "I'm going to come back here and end both of them. I could use the help, but if you have any doubts-"

El didn't, and she followed in suit, putting cuts into her palms as well. Mike(W.) went next, and Max and Beverly, Bill and Eddie, Will and Dustin and all the others until the knife got to Richie and he closed off the circle, the process familiar, but new.

"What do we do now?" Eddie asked. He glanced at Will, and they both tightened their hold on each other.

The group turned to Sara, expecting that she'd have the answer, but she didn't. The only certainty in their future was that, despite all their efforts, this wasn't over.

Behold, it is over! I'm both sad and happy that this story's finished. If there are any questions or anything you'd like me to clarify then feel free to ask me, either in a review or send me a message and I'll post a Q&A sheet later on. Anyway, I hope you liked it. I might start on a sequel, but I'm not going to guarantee that, just because when I'm writing I know I'm a bit of a flake. Anyway, that's all.